Prologue: German Army Base in Saxony-Anhalt

Late at night, at 2:47 a.m., the disaster began suddenly and without any warning.
"Assistant Commander, there's an abnormality in the radar. We're unable to detect it."
In the central control room, the brains of the base, the assistant commander on night duty frowned and groaned as he heard the radar operator's report.
"Is it broken?"
"Maybe, but the main and sub are both out of service at the same time. It could be a magnetic storm."
"A geomagnetic storm? Could it cause radar problems?"
"What is that?" the assistant commander thought, frowning earnestly.
"If something like that were to happen, there'd be some advance warning. Well, that's fine. I'll contact the Air Force and send out an airborne patrol plane. We'll use it as a substitute until the base's radar is up and running again."
"roger that"
As he watched the operator's back as he began to communicate, the assistant commander wondered with a sour look on his face whether a malfunction or a geomagnetic storm would be more troublesome. If it was a malfunction, naturally there would be a budget for repairs, and if the repairs took a long time, they would also need to cover the cost of sending out an airborne patrol plane for the time being. A geomagnetic storm would likely be a temporary phenomenon, so the cost would only be the same as sending out an airborne patrol plane once, but the problem would be what would happen if the geomagnetic storm was so severe that even planes couldn't be sent out. If that were to happen, the base would effectively be unable to operate until the geomagnetic storm subsided. However, the reality was far worse than he had expected, and the situation was far more troublesome.
"Commander! We can't contact the airbase! No radio or landline calls working!"
Hearing the operator's panicked voice, the assistant commander instinctively stood up from his seat.
"What did you say?"
"It's not just the airbase, we can't contact anywhere! We have internal lines but we've been completely cut off from outside communication!"
"That's ridiculous! Who on earth would be so bold as to cut off communications at a military base..."
Then, the assistant commander's voice was drowned out by a roar accompanied by an incredible vibration.

"Wh-what?"
"Someone is attacking this base! Numerous missiles, no, rockets, ahhh!"
Vibrations and roars shook the entire central control room violently. At the same time, the normal lights went out and were replaced by emergency lights.
"Level 1 emergency alert issued! Capture the enemy and retaliate with all forces from the base!"
In the unreliable light of the emergency lights, the assistant commander shouted at the top of his lungs.
"Helicopter units, tank units, Wanzer units, all operational aircraft, launch immediately! Call up all personnel on standby and activate all reserve aircraft!"
"roger that!"
The operators, with expressions of panic on their faces, sent out instructions to the combat units one after another. The assistant commander glared at the fact that the internal line was still alive, which was a blessing in disguise. However, the reports coming back from each part of the base were so horrific that they instantly blew away any such optimistic thoughts.
"Report from the helicopter unit! The enemy is a large number of Wanzers! Due to the overwhelming firepower, the helicopters are being shot down one by one as soon as they take off!"
"The tank unit was hit by rockets from the sky as soon as it set out! All of the vehicles in the departing unit are inoperable! The following unit is unable to leave the hangar!"
"An enemy missile has been fired into the second Wanzer Hangar! It has received a direct hit and all the Wanzers and personnel inside have been wiped out!"
"The Wanzer forces that were dispatched have engaged in a base firefight with the enemy Wanzers, but they are suffering heavy damage from guided missiles fired from above! We can't defend ourselves!"
"The standby personnel barracks were attacked by enemy vanguards! It was burned to the ground with napalm bombs, and there appear to be no survivors!"
"Large fires broke out at various base facilities in enemy-controlled areas! It’s burning down! There's nothing we can do about it!"
"The last communication was that an enemy Wanzer was about to force its way into the tank unit hangar, and then it was lost!"
"Communication has been lost at the heliport as well! It appears that the Wanzers that entered the area have been firing indiscriminately at both combatants and maintenance personnel alike!"

"Report from the Wanzer forces! The pilots who escaped from our destroyed Wanzers have been attacked by enemy Wanzers, along with their escape devices, and have been completely annihilated! The enemy is planning to kill us all!"
"Oh my goodness..."
The unfortunate assistant commander groaned as he felt the color drain from his face in an instant. Who, why, how, and for what purpose? Questions spun around in his head, but of course there was no way he could find an answer. There was only one answer thrust before his eyes. This base, which was supposed to have boasted one of the most powerful fighting forces of the German army, no, of the EC armies, had been annihilated in an instant, and the base personnel, including himself, were about to be slaughtered mercilessly. That was the only reality.
"It's like... demons. A demonic attack."
As the assistant commander groaned in an irritated voice, one of the operators shouted in an urgent voice.
"Assistant Commander! The central control room is now too dangerous! Let's escape!"
"Escape? Where and how do we escape this demonic enemy?"
The assistant commander asked angrily, almost venting his frustration, when at that moment the wall of the central control room burst, and a torrent of extremely high temperature flames and hot air, certain to bring death, poured into the room.

MISSION 1:
Elsa Joins the Army

To be honest, if the organization had been named something like Excalibur, rather than Durandal, named after the sword of the French warrior Roland, I might not have transferred. Before my superior officer in the French army recommended that I transfer, that was how weak my impression of the EC Land Tactics Research Institute Durandal was.
"Durandal is a specialized research institute for Wanzer tactics established by the EC. If you go here, you can learn the latest Wanzer tactics."
My superior officer, who was rumored to be the one who was virtually single-handedly running the French Wanzers unit, was a full-fledged general, but he called me, a mere non-commissioned officer, in person and earnestly encouraged me to transfer.
"It is unfortunate, but when it comes to Wanzers, the French army is lagging behind other countries' militaries in every aspect. It is also very lamentable that the Wanzers deployed to our units are old and there are only a few of them, but if we can just pour in the budget when an emergency occurs, it may be possible to make up for this somehow. However, an even more serious problem is that there are almost no officers, myself included, who are capable of using Wanzers tactically. After all, the Wanzer units of our French army have never been to the field of actual combat since their founding."
Saying this, the superior officer frowned bitterly.
"What's more, our country's military academy doesn't even have a course that specializes in teaching vantage tactics! I've been saying for a while now that we should invite experts in vantage tactics from Germany, England, the USN, OCU, or even Zaftra to give lectures at the military academy, but those stubborn idiots just won't listen! In this situation, the only way to save the French army is to send talented people abroad and have them learn the latest vantage tactics!"
"......"
I wondered if I, Sergeant Elsa Eliane, was the excellent person in question, but I hesitated for a moment and decided not to say anything. In the military, there are many cases where it is better not to say anything if you are unsure whether to say it or not. Especially when the person you are speaking to is of a higher rank than you, silence is usually the best answer. Then, my superior looked at me again and said,
"Sergeant Eliane, in my opinion, you are one of the most excellent Wanzer pilots in the French military. Furthermore, you have a flexible way of thinking, and are capable of not only completing the tasks given to you, but also adding ingenuity. You are someone who should have gone on to military academy to hone your skills as a

commander. In fact, your immediate superior has recommended you as the top candidate for commission as an officer. However, even if you go on to the French military academy now, there is absolutely nothing you would learn to become a Wanzer unit commander! On the contrary, it would only make you more distant from Wanzers."
"...I was not aware of that."
I don't want to become an officer at all, but I don't want to be far from Wanzer no matter where I go, I thought vaguely. The Eliane family is originally a military family, or rather a family that has produced many soldiers, but almost none of them have become officers. My great-grandfather, grandfather, and father all served as non-commissioned officers for many years before being discharged, and some of my older brothers who are still in the French army have stubbornly refused to go to military academy, no matter how many times their superiors have encouraged them to do so. In short, the Eliane family is a stubborn, conservative family of country folk who hate thinking about difficult things and love to get their bodies moving in the field. Normally, with that kind of temperament, one would become a farmer or a craftsman, but for some reason, the men in the Eliane family have naturally chosen to serve in the military for generations. It may be true that they are very patriotic, but I feel that they have a stronger sense of it being a familiar job. My great-grandfather, who passed away five years ago, lived to be over 100 years old, but including his time as a reservist and military officer, he was a die-hard soldier who served in the French army for over 50 years. He told me and my brothers many old stories and legends that are hard to tell if they are fact or fiction. According to the story, the Eliane family has been serving in the French army since our ancestors, who traveled with the emperor to Egypt, Spain, and Russia about 300 years ago, and returned alive despite suffering a terrible experience. My great-grandfather's grandfather was killed in battle at Verdun, my uncle was shot while working in the resistance against Nazi Germany, and my brother never returned from the Indochina Peninsula. Regardless of the old legends, my great-grandfather's own experiences were quite tragic, but we listened attentively. It seems that I was the first woman to be assigned to a combat unit, but there were many stories of women in my family serving as military nurses, communications officers, interpreters, etc. I heard that my great-grandfather's daughter, that is, one of my great-aunts, was an intellectual who was the first member of the Eliane family to be appointed to an officer-equivalent position, even though she was a member of the military. So one of the reasons I joined the French military was the family tradition, but another reason was the Wanzer. The Wanzer

came into the limelight as a main land warfare weapon about twenty years ago, right around the time I was born. It seems that it had existed as a special work machine for mine disposal long before that, and it had been effective in battles in terrain that tanks could not enter, but it was too expensive and was not seen as a weapon that could replace tanks. At least, no one thought that the French military would have an independent Wanzer unit. However, in the conflict between the USN and OCU over Huffman Island, which rose up in the Pacific Ocean, the Wanzer was adopted as a main land warfare weapon and played a decisive role in the war, which greatly changed the perception of the Wanzer even in EC countries that were not directly involved. In Germany and the UK, the reorganization of the army progressed rapidly with Wanzer units as the main force, and although France was late to the game, it still managed to organize its own Wanzer units. Then, images and information about Wanzers began to circulate with such force and scale that even I, a mere child at the time, could see them. I still remember well that there was a boy in my elementary school class who was a Wanzer fanatic. Boys are usually interested in the latest weapons, but his devotion to Wanzers was extraordinary. Looking back, he was small, severely nearsighted, and had a frail constitution and was prone to illness, so he may have admired the powerful human-shaped Wanzers as his ideal body. Meanwhile, influenced by my older brothers, I was a typical tomboy who didn't care about how I dressed and would run around the fields and mountains covered in mud with the boys. Although I was strong-willed, I wasn't particularly big or strong, so when the boys got serious about doing something, I was usually left behind. Then, as I was feeling frustrated and depressed about being left behind by the boys I was hanging out with, a Wanzer enthusiast who also treated me as a nuisance called out to me.
"Don't worry about that, Elsa. No matter how strong you are, or how fast you are, it doesn't matter once you're in a Wanzer. The future is Wanzers."
"I see."
I didn't take his words literally, but I became interested in Wanzers after that. It's true that there were quite a few female Wanzer pilots from the USN and OCU who had distinguished themselves in the Huffman Conflict, although I wouldn't say there were as many as male. Among them were some slender and beautiful women who could rival models, and at that moment I made up my mind to try out.
"I want to become a Wanzer pilot too!"
Looking back, it's a motive that I can only laugh at, but for better or worse, my young determination didn't encounter any obstacles and continued to move forward.
Compared to other weapons, Wanzers are equipped with a complete escape

mechanism to allow the pilot to escape in an emergency, and not only is the death rate in actual combat low, but there are also very few fatal accidents during training. My father and older brothers knew this, so when they heard that I wanted to become a Wanzer pilot, they all smiled with relief and nodded, telling me to do my best. And, I think this is fortunate, but I was compatible with the Wanzer. There are many who want to become a Wanzer pilot, a flashy, state-of-the-art weapon that is also very safe, but surprisingly many people can't stand the claustrophobic feeling of the Wanzer cockpit and drop out. There is even a true story of an officer who was renowned as a tank commander, but when he got into a Wanzer, he couldn't stand it for even a minute and screamed and jumped out of the cockpit. At first, I was surprised at how small the cockpit was, but I quickly got used to it, and now I feel rather comfortable there. If anything, it may be that because the cockpit is so small, the sense of physical body disappears, and you get the illusion that the Wanzer is your own body. This is just my own speculation, but I feel that people who are too confident in their own physical body and cannot bear the loss of physical senses may not be suited to be Wanzer pilots. Anyway, in the six years since I volunteered for the military at the age of sixteen, I have honed my skills as a Wanzer pilot, and have come to be recognized as someone who literally pilots the Wanzer as if it were my own body. I have also been promoted to the rank of sergeant major, the highest rank for a non-commissioned officer. In my own way, I think my days have been very fulfilling. However, that does not mean that I have no complaints. Despite being assigned to a combat unit for six years, I have never had a single combat experience. However, I am not the only one who has no combat experience; all of the French Wanzer units are the same. And unless something suddenly happens to invade the French mainland, this situation will not change. Five years ago, shortly after I was assigned to the Wanzer unit, the USN and OCU, who were staring at each other on Huffman Island, clashed, and a war called the Second Huffman Conflict broke out. The ZAFTRA-led Peacekeeping Organization mediated this and a ceasefire agreement was signed, and peacekeeping forces were dispatched to Huffman Island. The core of this force was the ZAFTRA army, but the EC countries that agreed to the ceasefire also sent troops, and Germany and the UK in particular sent a small number of state-of-the-art Wanzer units as a field test. However, France only sent a transport aircraft unit, a token tank unit, and a helicopter unit, and refrained from sending a Wanzer unit. On the surface, the French government issued a statement that what the Peacekeeping Forces needed was an aircraft unit that could reliably transport supplies, rather than fighting forces such as Wanzers, but behind the scenes, rumors were flying around

that Zaftra had refused because the old-style Wanzers belonging to the French military were not a fighting force, or that they were afraid that there would be casualties in battle, since many of the children of government officials and politicians became Wanzer pilots. I don't know what the truth was, and I don't want to know. However, this incident made everyone realize, without any logic, that the French military had no intention of sending the Wanzer unit into actual combat unless something extraordinary happened. Some of the Wanzer pilots who were my seniors requested to be transferred, saying that there was no point in being in a unit that couldn't fight, and I'm sure there were others who were greatly relieved, even though they didn't say it out loud. To be honest, since I had only just been assigned to the Wanzer unit, I didn't really understand what was going on. Of course, I thought it was a pity that he missed the chance to go into battle, since he had joined the military with the intention of fighting, but I honestly wondered whether it was worth risking his life to mediate the war between the USN and OCU, even if it was for the sake of international peace, and not to protect his homeland France or the EC. Furthermore, later on, the shocking truth was revealed that the Second Huffman Conflict on New Continent Oceana was actually an experimental war for the practical application of high-performance Wanzers using human brains, orchestrated by the military, politicians, and military companies of the USN and OCU, who were the parties to the war, as well as ZAFTRA. When I learned this, I was glad that myself and my colleagues in the French Wanzer unit did not have to lose their lives in vain in a war that was started by a conspiracy with no just cause, but I also felt disappointed that this made it even more unlikely that the French army would send its Wanzer unit into battle. In fact, after that, the EC left the Permanent Peacekeeping Organization, and not only France, but also Germany and Britain showed no sign of sending troops outside of EC territory. In short, the EC countries began to move in the direction of enjoying peace within their own shells, and the role of military personnel, not just us Wanzer pilots, was greatly reduced. It's not that I was indifferent to the current situation, but there's nothing a mere NCO could do by worrying about the international situation. I thought I had accepted that it was the job of politicians to think about what to do with the country, and within that, it was the job of officers, senior officers of the rank of colonel or general, to think about what to do with the military. But I never would have imagined that a senior general would seriously consider what the future of the French military should be, and then come up with the idea of sending me to an external agency. Frankly, it was beyond my imagination.
"Well then, Sergeant Eliane. Why don't you go to Durandal and learn the latest

Wanzer tactics thoroughly? I believe that this will be the most effective way for you to contribute to your country, France."
"Understood, Your Excellency."
Seeing my superior officer's enthusiasm, I replied in a semi-appeasing manner.
"It will be difficult for me to leave the French army, but if Your Excellency tells me that this is a way to contribute to my country, then I will abide by it."
"Um, thank you very much."
Saying this, my superior officer nodded vigorously. And so, I left the French military to join the EC Land-Based New Tactical Research Institute Durandal, but at first, I didn't even know exactly where the Durandal facility was located. The EC's conference center is in Paris, and since the organization's name is taken from the sword of Roland, I assumed it would be in France, but to my surprise, the facility is located in England. Then, my superior officer showed me an official document from the EC Congress. According to that document, the EC Land-Based New Tactical Research Institute Durandal is divided into three departments: Development, Medical Research, and Tactical Research, and I will be assigned to the Tactical Research Department. The three departments together have about 300 researchers, making it a fairly large organization for a research institute, but what surprised me most was the description that the Tactical Research Department has about 40 dedicated Wanzer pilots, about 20 Wanzers in full operation, and about 60 Wanzer parts kept for research and development and replacement. In other words, Durandal can operate about twenty Wanzers at any one time, and about forty in an emergency, making it roughly the same fighting power as the Wanzer forces of France, Italy, Spain, and others. Of course, the fighting power of a single Wanzer varies greatly between old and new models, but even if they are all old models like the French army, forty Wanzers is still an incredible force. It is by no means the scale you would imagine from the word research institute. But, on the other hand, I decided that it was precisely because they had secured such a large number of Wanzers and pilots that a mere institute was able to independently research and develop new tactics for efficiently operating Wanzers.
"Durandal has its own aircraft besides the Wanzers, so you can just wait at the airbase in France. I'll have them come and pick you up."
Following the directions of my cheerful superior officer, I headed to the air base with a backpack packed with my few personal belongings. After a short wait, an aircraft with an unfamiliar shape, probably a large transport plane, glided into the designated runway.

"Is that the Durandal aircraft that came to pick me up?"
I was expecting a small transport jet, so I was stunned by the huge plane that had arrived. However, the emblem on the wing of the transport plane certainly had the word "Durandal" written on it. Then, the tail of the stopped transport plane opened, and a well-built man got out. He seemed to be in his mid-forties. He had the air of someone who had served as a professional soldier for many years, and exuded an air that was similar to my grandfather and father. Then, he walked up to me and spoke in a rich, resonant bass voice.
"It's nice to meet you. I'm Zead Elger, leader of the tactical research department at Durandal, the EC's new land tactics research institute. Normally, you can just call me Zead."
"It's nice to meet you. My name is Elsa Eliane, a former French Army Sergeant and Wanzer pilot. I look forward to working with you."
When I responded, Zead gave a small smile.
"Nice to meet you. May I call you Elsa?"
"yes"
When I nodded, Zead walked slowly towards the transport plane. As I followed him in silence, he spoke in a gentle tone.
"Yes, there's no need to be so stiff. Durandal is not an army. There are only two positions: leader and member. Even if you go against me, the leader, you won't be charged with disobeying a superior officer."
"Y-Yes."
"I don't mean to be so stiff," I thought to myself, but I didn't say anything and just went ahead. Then, when I entered the transport plane, a young black man with glasses who was waiting for me there suddenly called out to me in a cheerful voice.
"Hello! You're the new recruit from the French army. I'm Hermes, I'm in charge of analysis but I do pretty much anything to do with computers and mechanics and also pilot planes, vehicles and Wanzers when we're short on hands. Nice to meet you!"
"I'm Elsa Eliane. Nice to meet you."
He spoke in a friendly, almost familiar tone, and although I was confused, I responded politely. Indeed, if this kind of attitude was the norm in this organization, then my reaction as a newly transferred NCO must have seemed very stiff. The young man who introduced himself as Hermes then smiled cheerfully, showing his white teeth.
"Don't speak so formally. Durandal isn't a military force, after all. Right, Zead?"
"Yeah."

Zead, who seems even more of a soldier than I do, smiled wryly at Hermes' flippant remark.
"Well, we can discuss the details while we're on the move, but let's get going. If we leave now, we can get back to HQ before noon."
"Right. I'll go get permission to take off."
With that, Hermes walked off with a brisk step. He had said that he would act as pilot when there were not enough people, and it seemed that he had been piloting this transport plane. Then, Zead turned to me and asked with a grin.
"Are you surprised?"
"Yeah, well, a little."
When I replied ambiguously, Zead became serious and continued.
"Even though he may look like that, Hermes is an extremely talented person. It would not be an exaggeration to call him a genius. For now, the only reason Durandal can call itself a research institute is because he is a member of the institute."
"A genius, you say?"
Taken aback, I looked back at Zead intently. Judging from his expression, it seemed he wasn't joking. Zead then continued in a more serious tone.
"Some of Durandal's members are former military personnel, like you and me, but there are also those, like Hermes, who have no ties to the military at all. And our civilian members don't follow the strict discipline of the military. Because of this, Durandal is looked down upon by some in the EC military as a ragtag bunch with no discipline whatsoever. But I believe that unless civilians and soldiers can think flexibly and transcend their respective boundaries to come up with ideas, new Wanzer tactics can't be created. In fact, all of the Wanzers used for tactical development at Durandal are adjusted by Hermes, but thanks to ideas that I, a soldier, would never think of, they are able to demonstrate extremely high performance."
"……Really"
That means, like a racing machine or a custom car, they specially tune the Wanzer to make it perform at high performance, I thought, tilting my head. It was certainly an impressive skill, but it seemed a bit off-topic to research into Wanzer tactics. Just then, Hermes' voice began to ring out from the speaker on the plane.
"The control tower has given us permission to take off. We'll be taking off shortly, so please take your seats and fasten your belts."
Before I could finish speaking, the plane started to move, and Zead and I hurriedly took our seats.

"It seems like there's something you want to ask."
Seeing my face as I fastened my belt, Zead said.
"If you have any questions, feel free to ask. If I can explain anything, I'll answer."
"Well then, let me ask you something. You just said that the reason Durandal can call itself a research institute is because Hermes is employed there, but then what do the other researchers do? Are they his assistants?"
I wondered if it was a bit of a mean question, but partly I wanted to ask it to gauge my new boss's thoughts. I didn't mind that Zead thought highly of Hermes, but if he was truly a genius Wanzer researcher, then surely he shouldn't have had such a valuable resource do menial tasks like piloting the plane that came to pick up the new recruits.
However, I was honestly taken aback by Zead's response.
"There are currently no other researchers. There are engineers and operators seconded from defense companies, but Hermes is the only one doing work that can be called a researcher."
"Only one researcher?"
Wait a second, where on earth did the 300 or so research personnel go? I thought, stunned, and looked at Zead. Zead then gave a wry smile.
"Oh, I see you've seen the official EC Council document. That is, well, at the moment, still just a pipe dream. We need to create a proper research institute as soon as possible, just like that document says, but as things stand, we don't have enough personnel. The Tactical Research Department, which I lead, is scheduled to eventually have forty Wanzer pilots, but in reality, you are the eighth. The Development Department and Medical Research Department are still in the process of preparing their organizations, and leaders have not yet been decided."
"..."
Doesn't that mean that this organization called Durandal still has almost no substance? I groaned in amazement, though I didn't say it out loud. Perhaps sensing my thoughts, Zead continued his explanation in a matter-of-fact tone.
"Originally, the movement to establish an institute to research Wanzer tactics, separate from the military of each EC country, came more from defense contractors than from the military or governments of each country. They thought that if they cooperated in coming up with new tactics and developed a new Wanzer based on that concept, they could efficiently capture the entire EC military as a reliable customer. On the other hand, the majority of the EC military, especially in Germany and the UK, were of the opinion that it was enough to research Wanzer tactics within their own country, and that there was no need for a joint research institute with other

countries where secrets would easily leak. However, with the deployment of troops to Huffman Island, the USN, OCU, Furthermore, those who witnessed the Zaftra army's latest Wanzer operation realized that the EC army's Wanzer tactics were far behind the times, and began to insist on the need for cooperation in tactical research, which is when the winds began to change. As a result, military companies took the lead in lobbying the EC governments, and the military finally got off their butts, and about 80% of the preparations for the establishment of a joint research institute were complete. The Durandal concept you saw in the official E.C. Parliament document was drawn up around that time. But then, a bolt from the blue came and completely upended the setup."
"A bolt from the blue?"
When I asked him what on earth had happened, Zead replied with a wry smile.
"Yes, it was the Sakata Industry Incident. The official name given by the EC Parliament is the Second Huffman Conflict Conspiracy Incident, so perhaps we should call it that. It's said that the governments and military of the USN, OCU, and ZAFTRA were involved in that incident, but the main player in the conspiracy was the OCU's military contractor, Sakata Industry. Sakata Industry's European subsidiary was one of the companies that strongly lobbied the EC governments to establish the Wanzer Tactical Joint Research Institute."
"......Is that so"
I was half stunned, and dazzled. When I heard that a military company had used a human brain to develop a high-performance Wanzer, I thought it was a horrible thing to do, but I never dreamed that the same company was also lobbying the EC to establish an institute to jointly research new Wanzer tactics. From the company's perspective, they were probably just hoping that if more advanced tactics were researched and used in actual combat, their company's high-performance Wanzers would sell more. But even so, it left me with complicated feelings. And then Zead continued.
"The exposure of Sakata Industries' conspiracy sent shock waves through defence companies everywhere, who had been trying to strengthen their ties with governments. EC governments also became wary of defence companies and began to distance themselves from them. The Wanzer Tactical Joint Research Institute, which had been in the process of being established mainly by the defence industry, was also affected and was on the verge of being scrapped."
"What? Did it just die away?"
I was once again shocked and astonished to see Durandal in such a precarious

situation.
"But in the end, it was established, right?"
“Yes, at the beginning of this year, we were finally officially recognized as the EC Land Tactics Research Institute. Until now, we hadn’t been able to gather enough personnel, but now we’ve somehow managed to appeal to the military forces of each EC country and get them to recommend promising personnel. You were one of those people, recommended by the French army.”
Saying that, Zead grinned.
"Originally, it was France that was most keen to establish a joint research institute. Of all the EC military forces, France was keenly aware that its own Wanzer tactics were behind the times. However, at that time France happened to be experiencing a change of government, and because a major military contractor had close ties with Sakata Industries, the government strongly opposed the initiative, forcing the country to pull out. If no one had taken over, the project would have truly fizzled out, but fortunately, at the last minute, the UK offered to take over. After that, there were many twists and turns over issues such as authority, the chain of command, and confidentiality, but somehow they managed to get the institute established."
"I see, so that's how it happened."
So that's why, even though the organization's name is Durandal, the facility is located in England, I thought to myself. Then Zead continued speaking calmly again.
"However, it seems that the UK can only provide a venue, and has no intention of investing in anything more than that. Originally, we were supposed to be sponsored by a military company, which would provide funding and personnel, but under the current circumstances, that is not very likely. In the end, we have no choice but to do everything ourselves. In this situation, we are researching new Wanzer tactics and trying to demonstrate our capabilities. We were fortunate to have someone as talented as Hermes join us, but with the current limited personnel, we would need him to take on a variety of tasks in the field as well, otherwise we would be completely useless. In that sense, I said earlier that there were no other researchers besides Hermes, but in reality, that is not the case. I think that all of the members of Durandal, including you, need to be Wanzer researchers, not just Wanzer pilots. This will be essential until we have enough members."
"That's, well... that's difficult."
I sighed softly. I had been assigned to Durandal with the intention of learning new Wanzer tactics, but it seemed that I had been given the opportunity to do so. Apparently I would have to use my strength to study the Wanzers and come up with

tactics. No matter how I thought about it, this was a job that was far too much for someone like me who had only received the average NCO training, and it made me feel dizzy. Then, perhaps sensing my distress, Zead smiled again and spoke.
"Well, I'm not saying you have to suddenly prove yourself as a Wanzer researcher. Currently, Durandal is conducting Wanzer-related research and evaluation work at the request of various companies and government organizations. Through that work, you will be able to learn efficient Wanzer operation methods and then apply that to tactical research."
"...Yes, I'll try my best."
But even if he said that, I still had no idea what to do, I thought to myself, and sighed again. I was in a really pathetic situation. But then, all of a sudden, Zead spoke in an impressed tone.
"Elsa, you're serious."
"Eh? Is that so?"
I asked, sounding a little confused, and Zead nodded slightly.
"Until I told you, you hadn't heard anything about the actual situation at Durandal, right? If you were suddenly told something like this, most people would regret being assigned to such an incredible organization. It's not surprising that you would get angry and say that this isn't what we said, that I'm going home."
"......"
However, while it may be okay to say something like that before you arrive, saying something like that after you arrive is probably not something that's tolerated in the military, I realized as I was about to say it. Durandal, at least in principle, is not a military unit. And while I was at a loss for words, Zead continued in a calm tone.
"However, you are primarily concerned about whether you will be able to carry out your duties properly in the special environment of Durandal. That may be true if you say it is typical of a soldier, but as his superior, I find your serious and responsible attitude very pleasing."
"......is that so"
I replied, more than a little confused. I felt that I was in a pathetic state, anxious and distressed about my future, but my new boss seemed to see me as being serious. I was a little worried as to whether Zead had a correct understanding of my condition, but from what I had felt so far, he seemed to have deep, accurate, and in a way, harsh and realistic insight. If this person said that everything was okay, then it was probably okay. I wasn't sure if Zead had seen through my speculation, but he continued speaking calmly.

"For the time being, you will be learning the duties of Durandal as my assistant. It's a kind of apprenticeship period. There will be various things you will have to learn along the way, but for the time being, as long as you have the skill to operate the Wanzer properly, there will be no problem. However, Durandal Wanzers are slightly specially tuned. As soon as you arrive at HQ, I would like you to actually ride one and get a feel for it."
"yes"
The conversation returned to the Wanzer, and I nodded with a sense of relief. Then, Zead looked at the monitor on the plane and said,
"We're almost there. Let's have lunch at HQ."
"So, Arrow 6, how is your special Durandal Wanzer?"
Hermes' cheerful voice rang out from the headset. I responded as I steered the Wanzer I had just climbed into to the designated location.
"It's much more responsive than the planes I've flown up until now. That's good, but the control method is slightly different, so it's a bit confusing."
"The reaction speed has been increased to nearly the limit of Zenith's. As for the controls, well, once you get used to it, this one should definitely be easier to use."
Well, since this control method was designed by Hermes, it's only natural that it should be easy for the person who designed it to use, I thought to myself, but I didn't say anything and just concentrated on piloting the Wanzer. The Durandal HQ facility was located in the countryside of England, occupying a fairly large area. On the plane, Zead had told me some gloomy stories about how it was on the verge of disappearing and had barely been established, so I had prepared myself for the worst, to be crammed into a temporary prefabricated building that was only in name a HQ, but from a quick look, it looked like a properly-equipped Wanzer base facility, and to be honest, I was relieved. What was even more surprising was that the lunch served in the HQ cafeteria was quite tasty, although I wouldn't go so far as to say it was exquisite. After all, when he'd told his father back home that he was transferring to Durandal, he'd received a response that, if it was his own decision, he had no objection to it, but the food in Britain tastes awful, so he'd never imagined he'd be able to get a decent meal in Britain, especially in a dining hall run by an organization quasi-military. Then, as soon as lunch was over, Hermes leaned forward over the table and said, Tune.
"Well then, I'll have Elsa try out the special Durandal Wanzer I adjusted for her. The one used by the French army was a Zenith, right?"
"Yeah"

When I nodded, Hermes smiled, showing her white teeth.
"Okay, OK! Zenith has a perfectly tuned aircraft in the hangar. Use that one. Here!"
"When you board the Wanzer, your call sign will be Arrow Six. I'll be Father One, and Hermes will be Father Twelve. We'll be giving you instructions from central control."
Zead spoke in a calm tone.
"Today we'll be testing out the basic movements and firing practice rounds. If there are no problems, we'll move on to parachute tests and mock battles, but that will be after tomorrow."
"yes"
Although I had no experience in actual combat, training to fly a Wanzer in a simulated battle was a part of my daily routine. The aircraft was a Zenith, which I was familiar with, and even though it was a special edition Durandal, I didn't think there would be any difference that would make it difficult to operate. However, when I actually went to the hangar and piloted a Durandal Wanzer, it was so difficult to handle that I wondered if it was really the same Zenith. Its reactions were so fast that the moment I took my first step, I nearly lost my balance and fell forward.
"...That's quite a beast."
With a small groan, I carefully piloted my Wanzer. Fortunately, when I was promoted to squad leader in the French army, I had been forced to switch from a slow-reacting soldier's machine to a faster squad leader's machine, so I had some idea how to fill in the sensory gaps. However, even the squad leader's machine, which was fast in the French army, was like the difference between a docile gelding and an untrained free-range horse compared to Durandal's Wanzer.
"Well, it's true that if you want to try out new tactics, it might not be feasible to pilot an average Wanzer. But unless you have an extremely fast Wanzer like this, you won't be able to adapt, so even if you come up with a new tactic, it doesn't seem like it would be of much use in actual combat."
In short, if you make the Wanzer high performance and put a good pilot who can use it, you can achieve good results. But that's all, isn't that too obvious and doesn't amount to tactical research? I thought to myself, following Zead's instructions over the headset, and took the Wanzer out of the hangar.
"Okay. Now, pick up some speed and run to the tower in front of you."
"roger that"
I drive the Wanzer, careful not to lose my balance. Although it is a training dummy weapon, I am holding a heavy machine gun and a shotgun in each hand, so if I make a

careless movement, I could easily fall over.
"Arrow 6, we've reached our destination."
"Okay. Can you see the black building to your right, at three o'clock?"
Following Zead's instructions, I activated the Wanzer's optical sensor.
"Yes, I saw the black building...oh?"
At that moment, I thought I saw something move in the shadow of the building indicated, so I squinted my eyes and stared closely at the image on the sensor.
"Father 1, there is something that appears to be a Wanzer in the shadow of a black building. It is being disrupted by the power of the building itself, so it cannot be confirmed by the heat sensor, but from what I can see, it appears to be two operational units hiding there."
"Very well, I found it."
Zead's satisfied voice came from the headset.
"Now, go round and fire at them. It's up to you to decide where to place your fire."
"roger that"
Feeling like I was being tested, I quickly pushed the Wanzer forward. Indeed, with such quick reactions, a Wanzer could move almost exactly as intended. In other words, whether or not it could move efficiently was entirely dependent on the judgement of the pilot.
“We don’t know what weapons the enemy has. In that case, we’d better use the buildings as cover until we’re within the effective range of the machine gun.”
It would be suicidal to rush in front of an opponent with a long-range weapon such as an armor-piercing or explosive shell cannon, but if you hesitate and don't get close, you'll give them time to get closer. Timing is important. I advanced my Wanzer along the building, and when I took my aim, I jumped diagonally and readied my weapon. The moment I saw that the two Wanzers in the shadow of the building were both equipped with shotguns, I stopped my ship's advance and simultaneously fired the machine gun. A distinctive bang sound rang out, and the training bullets fired in succession from the machine gun hit the front of the two Wanzers. Of course, since they were training bullets, they wouldn't damage the armor, but if they were real bullets, the amount of damage inflicted would be automatically measured.
"Okay, stop shooting."
I stopped firing as Zead said it, and a somewhat irritated, brusque voice came through the headset.
"This is Arrow 2. Requesting permission to engage."
"No. We're not planning on having a mock battle today. You guys will have to avoid

Arrow 6's fire as much as possible."
Zead stated calmly, to which Arrow 2 replied in a challenging tone.
"Well, let me go, I gave you a shotgun. Besides, if you're just going to be a target,
"You have your own fully automatic unmanned control machine that Arrow 2 is so proud of! Anyway, being shot at unilaterally while there's a weapon in my hand is not my nature!"
"Come on, Arrow 2, don't get too heated."
Another voice, this time with a hint of laughter, cut in. It was probably the pilot of the second Wanzer in front of them. Arrow 2 then spoke with a firm smack.
"You shut up and let the rookie shoot you!"
"My dear Latona, you shouldn't say that."
The other Wanzer pilot responded in a tone that could only be described as silly, in stark contrast to his partner. I was half-amused and watched the events unfold, wondering what on earth was going on, but when the Arrow 2 Wanzer pilot aimed its shotgun right at me, I could no longer say anything.
"Arrow 2, don't do anything on your own!"
Finally, Zead let out an angry yell, but Arrow 2 completely ignored him and spoke to us.
"So, Arrow 6. Are you up for it? Or would you rather not be treated so harshly in a mock battle on your first day?"
"Personally, I'm happy to accept the challenge. But even if Durandal isn't a military force, is it really okay to ignore the orders of the Father 11?"
I thought I was scolding him, but it seems he only heard the first half of what I said.
"I'll take it! Highly recommended!"
"Hey, hold on!"
Even if I told him to wait, of course he wouldn't wait, I knew that. The Arrow 2 charged forward and fired its shotgun, but I jumped back to avoid it and fired my machine gun. The machine gun has a longer effective range than the shotgun, so if I don't let it close the distance, I can attack it unilaterally. However, the Arrow 2's Wanzer also tried to close the distance, charging forward at a ferocious speed. And even if the performance and pilot's skill are exactly the same, the structure of the Wanzer makes it faster to move forward than to retreat. The distance was closed in an instant, and the shotgun attack fired by the Arrow 2 grazed my Wanzer. If it was a direct hit, it would be measured as a considerable amount of damage, even if it wasn't immediately equivalent to destroying the aircraft. But in fact, I was waiting for this moment.

"Now!"
With a burst of energy, I fired both the machine gun and the shotgun at the same time. Using weapons with different effective ranges at the same time is quite advanced and difficult as a Wanzer combat technique, but if it lands well, it can deal devastating damage to the opponent with a single hit. And it seems that this hit was successful, as Arrow 2's Wanzer fell forward and stopped. Generally, training Wanzers are set to stop when the virtual damage automatically measured by the training bullet hits exceeds a value equivalent to the destruction of the unit, and Durandal's Wanzer seemed to be no exception. Then, the other Wanzer, belatedly, fired its shotgun. Perhaps it thought that it couldn't just stand by and watch its colleague get killed, but the distance was just too far, and it wasn't closing in on me as aggressively as Arrow 2.
"Could this person be an amateur?"
Tilting my head, I quickly gauged the distance and returned fire with my machine gun. If we kept firing at this great distance, even if the Wanzer was a cutting-edge, high-performance machine and the pilot was an expert marksman, as long as we were using a shotgun, it would be unable to win against the machine gun. After a while of firing, the other Wanzer also seemed to have received damage equivalent to the destruction of its body, so it stopped firing and stood there with its arms hanging limp. Then, Zead's voice began to flow from the headset.
"You win, Arrow 6. Stop firing."
"yes"
I stopped firing as instructed, but I still can't let my guard down. It seems that the Durandal organization is a place where my common sense doesn't apply in many ways.
"Father 1, is the test run complete?"
When I asked, Zead paused for a moment before answering.
"That's right. Although things have turned out quite differently than planned, I can see that you have the skills to more than adequately use Durandal's Wanzer. Let's wrap it up for today."
"roger that"
"Whew," I sighed softly, and turned the Wanzer around to return to the hangar. Just then, the forced stop seemed to be lifted, and the Arrow 2 Wanzer started to move, but of course it didn't try to attack me, and instead silently watched my Wanzer leave.
"Well, No. 1, that's amazing! You took out Arrows 2 and 4 with just two pairs!"
When I put the Wanzer in the hangar and went to the central control room, Hermes

called out to me excitedly, as if she had been waiting for me to see her.
"Especially the tactic you set up on the Arrow 2, firing the machine gun and shotgun at the same time! I knew about it from the archives, but this was the first time I saw it being used in real life! I've got all the data on how it worked, so I'd like to use it as reference material. Is that okay?"
"Yeah, of course I don't mind that."
Feeling like a kid who had just seen a funny movie, I complied.
"But that doesn't mean it always works. Today, it worked surprisingly well."
"Yeah, I know, I know. I mean, if this tactic was guaranteed to be effective no matter when, where or who used it, it would have been adopted by the regular army a long time ago. It's precisely because this tactic is still incomplete that it's worth researching anew."
Hermes grinned knowingly.
"Also, the fact that it went better this time than before suggests that the faster the aircraft's reaction time, the easier it is to carry out this strategy. If we can unravel this relationship, I'm sure we'll get some interesting results!"
"Well, that's enough of your calculations."
Zead told Hermes with a wry smile, then turned his gaze towards me.
"Thank you for your hard work, Elsa. I never thought we'd suddenly have a mock battle, but I'm sure those two will have no choice but to acknowledge your excellence."
"Are they members of Durandal?"
Though it was a little late to ask, I asked just to be sure, and Zead nodded slightly.
"Yes, that's right. They are currently being punished for disobeying orders, but once that is over I will introduce them to you in person."
"Punishment, huh?"
At the ominous tone of his words, I felt my face stiffen a little. At that, Hermes exaggeratedly shrugged her shoulders and shook her head.
"Even if it's your own fault, that's harsh, Zead."
"It can't be helped. Even though Durandal is not a military force, if each member ignores the orders of their superiors and acts as they please, it cannot function as an organization."
Zead responded firmly, his expression tightening. In response, Hermes groaned with a look of genuine disgust on his face.
"Yeah, I know that. But cleaning all the temporary toilets on the grounds by evening is still a big job. Even if you hire a professional, it'll probably take half a day."

"...Is cleaning the toilet the punishment?"
I asked Zead in a relaxed voice, to which he replied in the affirmative with a serious expression.
"Yes, that's right. We can't put them in a barracks like in the military, and on the other hand, cutting their pay or stopping pay raises like in a private company doesn't have much effect on them. If we were to fire them, we would be in trouble."
"...Huh."
"But cleaning the toilets is a punishment for disobeying orders," I thought to myself, sighing. In other words, it's like making clumsy recruits or lazy soldiers run 20 laps around the field or do 100 push-ups in addition to their regular training. Then Hermes spoke, also in a serious tone.
"Just because you're cleaning toilets doesn't mean you can take it lightly. These are temporary toilets, so they don't have any automatic cleaning devices. You have to do everything by hand. It's really hard work."
"You seem to know a lot about this. Have you ever had to do it yourself?"
When I asked, Hermes' expression suddenly became complicated and complicated, and she let out an unintelligible noise, "Uuuh, ah." Then Zead replied with a wry smile.
"Well, it's best if you don't have to experience what it's like to be sentenced to clean toilets as punishment. Anyway, Elsa, did you have any thoughts about the two Arrows, Arrow 2 and 4, that you just faced?"
"What did you feel?"
When I asked him back, Zead continued, choosing his words carefully.
"So, mainly, what do you think about the two of yours fighting skills?"
"The Arrow 2 left me with the impression that there was something unbalanced about it. His ability to close the gap was extremely quick and skillful, yet his marksmanship skills were disproportionately low. Perhaps the weapon he normally uses in Wanzer combat is not a shotgun."
Remembering the mock battle from earlier, I answered, organizing my answers as best I could.
"Regarding Arrow 4, even before we get to combat skill, I think they lack the basic knowledge that each Wanzer weapon has a different effective range, and that you must always maintain a distance that gives your weapon the advantage. Also, I was a bit surprised that Arrow 2 and Arrow 4 didn't actually cooperate at all. If they had coordinated their attacks even a little, it would have significantly reduced our chances of winning."

"Hmm, that's an accurate observation."
Zead nodded vigorously in satisfaction.
"I believe that the basis of tactical research, not just in Wanzers, is the steady accumulation of data and the ability to interpret that data correctly. In modern times, machines have taken over most of the data accumulation, but the ability to make use of that data can only be honed by each individual through experience. Elsa, it seems that you have the qualities to become an excellent Wanzer tactical researcher."
"Oh really?"
I couldn't imagine that I'd said anything particularly clever, I thought to myself, but as long as my boss appreciated it, I guess that was fine. Then Hermes light-heartedly interjected.
"Well, if you try too hard from the first day and cram too much into it, you'll just get tired and your efficiency will decrease. I think this is more than enough for today. Right, Zead?"
"That's right. If you're tired, please rest at the dorms."
Saying that, Zead glances at the clock.
"Apparently, there will be a party to welcome the new members, that is, you, in the dining hall starting at seven o'clock. Most of the headquarters staff will be attending, so I would like you to attend if possible. Arrow 2 and Arrow 4 should also finish cleaning the toilets by then."
"Yes, I understand"
Unless there was an emergency, welcoming parties for new recruits were common in the military. However, they were only called welcome parties in name, and in reality they were more of a rite of passage or a kind of test. It was not uncommon for them to be made to wear outlandish costumes, forced to drink copious amounts of alcohol, or simply bullied. And they surely really love festivals and parties. Hermes announced with a very cheerful tone.
"Yes, it's not a tradition, but you might be asked to give a speech, so you should think about something, like a greeting or an introduction. Well, in the past, there have been some unfriendly people who just said their name and that was it, but on the other hand, there have been people who just kept talking for a long time."
"Oh."
Maybe it's Arrow 2 and Arrow 4, I thought silently. The latter could be Hermes himself, but if so, he wouldn't be aware of it.
"So, what are you going to do? Rest in the dorms until the welcoming party starts?"
"Well, I'm not that tired though. If you don't mind, could you tell me a bit more about

Durandal?"
When I poured the water over her, Hermes nodded, her eyes shining.
"Of course. No problem, right, Zead?"
"Oh, you have some spare time at work, so please go and talk to Elsa."
Saying that, Zead gave a wry smile.
"If I had time, I would like to join the conversation, but unfortunately, I have a mountain of desk work that needs to be completed by the end of today. I'd like to finish it somehow before the welcoming party."
"Wow, that's tough. I hope you consider it."
After receiving a rather mild encouragement from Hermes, Zead left the central control room. Then Hermes asked me.
"What should we do? Should we stay in central control or go to the break room?"
"This is fine."
Saying that, I sat down in the nearest available chair.
"Zead is Father 1, and you are Father 2. And as a new recruit, I'm Arrow 6, which means there are at least five other members, Arrows 11 through 5. Zead said that I'm the eighth Wanzer pilot belonging to the Tactical Research Department, but does that include you and Zead?"
"Ah, Zead and I are the only ones with Father Numbers, and there are currently no member codes other than Father and Arrow, so there are a total of eight members of the Durandal Tactical Research Department. All of us are Wanzer pilots. Well, there are many other staff members, such as operators, maintenance staff, pilots, facility security staff, office staff, and cafeteria staff, but they are temporary staff and not exclusively employed by Durandal."
As she answered, Hermes, perhaps out of habit, called up data one after another onto the terminal on her desk.
"Among those, the five of us who are currently at HQ are you, Zead, myself, and the two we just met, Arrow 2 and Arrow 4. The other three are out on business. Arrow 3 is scheduled to return to HQ in two or three days if there are no particular problems, but it looks like Arrow 1 and Arrow 5 will be staying there for around six months."
"Is that so"
It's true that I was suddenly curious as to where the two members of the newly established Durandal had been and what they had been doing for the last six months, but I couldn't decide whether it was something I should want to know or not. So I first asked about their immediate interests.
"So, how did that member end up joining Durandal? I was encouraged by a superior

officer in the French military to transfer, and I accepted."
"Yes, there are other members like that, but on the other hand, there are also members like me who left their original place and joined Durandal of their own accord."
Hermes said, shrugging.
"Since I'm on the management side, I know the circumstances of each member, but it's essentially a matter of privacy. I can't really say much about it. If you want to know more, please ask the person directly."
"That's right."
Honestly, I was relieved that you didn't start blabbering about my personal information, I thought to myself, giddy with laughter.
"So can you tell me your story?"
"Oh, okay. I'm originally from the USN."
Hermes began to speak nonchalantly, but I looked at him in surprise. The relationship between the EC and the USN is not as bad as that between the USN and the OCU, which were at war until a few years ago, but it is by no means good either. More than a hundred years ago, a group of people who advocated independence and the establishment of a democratic government on the Portuguese island of Madeira in the Atlantic Ocean were oppressed by the Portuguese government and fled the country. They persistently continued the Madeira independence movement in various countries, but when the USN was established, they claimed that Madeira should break free from the yoke of its colonial master and join the USN. The USN government officially expressed its support for this claim, and the scale of the matter became bigger. The EC has consistently supported Portugal, a member state, and has described the USN government's interest in Madeira as unjust and invasive, but the USN has criticized the EC, saying that it should listen to the voice of the Madeiran people who want freedom and independence. Fortunately, there have been no armed conflicts so far, but in recent years, a survey ship sent by a Madeira Island independence movement group living in the USN announced that there may be a valuable mineral deposit on the seabed near Madeira Island, and the Portuguese Navy threatened to drive away a second wave of survey ships with force, and the USN government issued a statement of condemnation. In such a situation, not only private companies but also the military, government and public institutions of EC countries have effectively barred people from the USN for confidentiality reasons. Despite this, I never thought that Durandal, which is approved as an EC land-based new tactical research institute, and the management members, who could be called

the core executives, would be from the USN. Hermes then continued his story in a very casual tone, not sure whether he had noticed my surprise or not.
"Anyway, ever since I was little, I've loved computers and Wanzers. And, as the saying goes, if you love something, you're good at it, and I know it sounds like I'm bragging, but I was recognized as being quite good in those areas. I graduated from university early and was scouted by a research institute of a company that made Wanzers. Without giving it much thought, I was planning to go there. But then the Sakata Industry incident happened."
Hermes said, shrugging her shoulders vigorously.
"I don't know if it was good luck or bad luck, but the place where I was scouted and was about to join was the very Sakata Industries USN Research Center."
"Yeeeesss!"
I too was astonished at this.
"That means..."
"Yeah, if the incident had been revealed a year or two later, I would have been completely embroiled in it. At worst, I might have been forced to research the infamous Bio-Neural Device, which uses the human brain to control Wanzers."
Hermes sighed deeply and was quiet for a while. Not knowing what to say, I joined him in silence. After only about ten seconds, he started talking again, but the pause felt awfully long to me.
"Once the incident was exposed, Sakata Industry was thrown into chaos, as you would expect, and the scouting talks fell through. Of course, even if I had been asked to come, I probably wouldn't have gone. This incident made me realize just how naive, vulnerable, and irresponsible I had been. I never thought about quitting my involvement with computers and Wanzers, but I vowed to myself that I would gather as much information as I could on my own, and then carefully consider and think carefully about what I would do and where I would do it."
"So, you decided to come all the way to EC and join Durandal?"
When I asked, Hermes gave a wry smile and nodded.
"In the end, that's what happened. In fact, after gathering various pieces of information, I found that the university I attended was connected to the USN military and large defense companies through some pretty dodgy connections, though I wouldn't say it was completely cozy. At the time, in the aftermath of the Sakata Industries incident, that connection was temporarily inactive, but I thought that if I continued to hang around in the USN, sooner or later I would be caught. Then, Zead, who had read my paper online, asked me to join, so I was lucky.

I decided to go to England."
"So that means you were scouted directly by Zead."
I see, that's why Zead thinks so highly of Hermes, I thought. Hermes then responded with a serious look on her face.
"That's true, but the other members were also chosen directly by Gide. In your case, there were several candidates submitted by the French army, and Gide personally nominated you."
"Eh? Is that so?"
I asked, genuinely surprised by Hermes' unexpected remark.
"But why me?"
"That is something I don't know. If you want to know, ask Zead directly."
Hermes responded with a grin.
"But I have to say, I'm really impressed with Zead's keen eye for discovering talented people. Whether it's your skill in Wanzer combat or your ability to observe your opponents, there's no doubt that you're an exceptional person."
"...Well, leaving me aside, if the other members were personally selected by Zead, does that mean they are all exceptionally talented?"
A rather delicate question, I thought, but Hermes nodded immediately.
"Yes, that's true. Although each of them is extraordinary in a different way, they are all far from being ordinary people. However, some of them have quirks in their personalities."
"Yeah, I think I understand that."
Thinking of Arrow 2 and 4, I nodded. Even Hermes was far from normal, and Zead seemed like a decent soldier, but it seemed like the commander himself was the one who selected these eccentric members for his unit.
"So, in the end, can we say that Durandal is, in effect, acting solely at Zead's discretion?"
"At least, that's the current situation, that's for sure."
Hermes answered simply.
"For the time being, command of Durandal is in the hands of the EC Assembly, but it hasn't been decided who will be in charge and how. And to begin with, there is no one above Zead who can take responsibility. There's no reason we should have to take orders from someone who won't take responsibility for themselves, right?"
"That's right."
"There are a lot of people in the world who like to give orders but don't want to take responsibility when it comes down to it," I added silently.

"You've finally come."
It was about 30 minutes into the welcome party that Zead dazzled as he glanced at the men and women in work uniforms who had entered the dining hall, smiling wryly. I had already given the standard speech as requested, and had been introduced to the main operators, maintenance officers, pilots, security officers, administrative officers, medical control officers, and contractors, and had just finished greeting them. Normally, even if a mere NCO like me was transferred, I wouldn't be treated so grandly, let alone a senior officer of the executive rank. It seemed that the Durandal members selected by Zead would be given the same status as officers, regardless of their previous rank or status.
"Elsa, let me introduce you. This is Arrow 2, Latona Rodiona Vasilev, and this is Arrow 4, Beck Canova, a member of Durandal. This is the newest recruit, Arrow 6, Elsa Eliane."
"I'm Elsa Eliane. Nice to meet you."
After being introduced by Zead, I politely greeted the two tall men and women. The man from Arrow 4 immediately put on a big smile and extended his hand.
"I'm Beck. Nice to meet you too. It seems that when it comes to Wanzer combat, you're way ahead of me."
"Well, I guess it's awful that a weaker member of the team than you have joined."
As Beck and I shook hands, the woman from Arrow 2 spoke in a harsh tone.
"But I'm now being treated the same as this loser, and that's a problem. What do you think about that, Arrow 6?"
"That's true. If you and I were to both equip our Wanzers with melee weapons and engage in a mock battle, I'm pretty sure the outcome would be the opposite of today's."
I had anticipated she might get involved, so I gave her the answer I had prepared.
"And if you're equipped with melee weapons and I'm equipped with firearms, I think we could have a pretty interesting mock battle, whatever the outcome."
"Hmm"
Latona tilted her head slightly and stared at me, as if to say something clever.
"What made you think I'd be stronger in a hand-to-hand fight?"
"The speed at which he closed the distance was incredible. For a moment I thought he was punching me without firing a shotgun."
Saying that, I gave a small laugh.
"Even in the French military where I was, there were pilots who excelled in dogfights, but it was the first time I'd ever been closed in on so closely."

"Yeah, that was my first experience of being hit by both machine gun fire and shotgun fire at the same time while closing in on someone."
Latona groaned in a tone that was a subtle mix of admiration and annoyance.
"If it had only been one, I'd be confident I could have closed the distance, but both... I wonder if I could have dodged them with my usual machine... Well, either way, I respect your skill."
"thank you"
I held out my hand, Latona accepted, and we shook hands. Then Beck put his hand to his forehead, gesticulated dramatically, and let out a lamenting noise.
"Hey, you two. Why are you two here together talking about such a bleak subject? Don't you have something more interesting to talk about?"
"I'm a Wanzer pilot first and foremost. What's wrong with two pilots getting so excited talking about Wanzer combat?"
Latona retorted, a little angrily. Then she turned to me and said firmly:
"Listen, Elsa. Don't bother with this guy. He's terrible at piloting a Wanzer, terrible at fighting, has no military experience, and isn't a computer genius like Hermes. The only things he's good at are talking about alcohol and food, and flirting with women, so I still don't understand why Zead chose someone like him to be a member of his team."
"My goodness, that's quite something to say."
Beck didn't seem particularly bothered and smiled brightly.
"Latona, I don't dislike your bluntness or bad manners, but unfortunately the public is not as tolerant as I am. Before I took on the role of negotiating with clients, I believe you had successfully canceled two or maybe three Wanzer testing projects that Durandal had taken on in the space of two weeks, right?"
"That's not my fault! The client's requirements change all the time, and they keep bringing up all sorts of topics that are not directly related to the project!"
Latona yells in a rage, and people around her, especially the office staff and contractors, shrug and quickly distance themselves, but Beck, at least on the surface, remains completely calm as he addresses the indignant Latona.
“Yes, as you say, the fault lies with the client. However, it’s not them who are in trouble when projects are canceled one after another, it’s us. So I, who can talk plainly and am patient, was appointed to negotiate.”
"Who has the patience, you slacker?"
Latona roared furiously, but I thought that Beck was a patient, or at least resilient, person, even if he was a slacker. Otherwise, it would have been impossible for him to

team up with Latona, who was obviously short-tempered.

MISSION 2:
Elsa's First Battle

The morning after the welcome party, I was fast asleep in my room at the accommodation when I was woken up by a phone call from Zead.
"I'm sorry to come at this late hour, but I have suddenly had to leave for Germany. I would like you to accompany me, so please get ready as quickly as possible and come to the central control room."
"Yes, I'll be there in two minutes."
Without further ado, I immediately jumped up, got changed in 30 seconds, grabbed my backpack and headed for the central control room. It was a tradition passed down through the Eliane family that if you couldn't perform a feat like this, you couldn't be called a proper soldier.
"That was fast. As expected."
Zead looked at me, who had really only taken two minutes to arrive, and smiled.
"However, Hermes will be accompanying us this time, so we must wait for him to arrive. We've been ordered to investigate, and we can't leave our analyst behind."
"May I ask what the mission entails?"
I asked in a pure NCO tone, and Zead's smile turned into a wry one as he responded.
"Let's discuss that once Hermes arrives. We'll have time to travel, so there's no need to rush. Also, it's fine when we're aboard the Wanzer, but when we speak directly, I would like you to avoid using a military tone as much as possible. Hermes dislikes it, and I often find myself falling for it."
"Okay... I get it."
When I repeated myself while stammering, Zead nodded calmly.
"It's hard to suddenly change old habits, but you can do it. Just be conscious of how you think and respond."
"yes"
Just as I was nodding, Hermes came in.
"What's wrong, Zead? Going to Germany at this time of night?"
"Just now, an emergency investigation mission has been ordered to Durandal in the name of the EC Council."
Zead's expression instantly tightened as he spoke in a powerful tone.
"Tonight, between 2:30 and 3:30, five army bases in Germany were destroyed almost simultaneously. We are being told to make every effort to quickly investigate whether this was an accident or a crime, and if it was a crime, who was responsible."
"Five bases destroyed at the same time?"
Hermes yelled, eyes wide.
"Sorry, it definitely wasn't an accident!"

"That may be true. However, it seems that many of the EC leaders and related parties think that the assumption that someone attacked and destroyed the building is just as unrealistic as the assumption that multiple fatal accidents occurred simultaneously. In any case, we can only comment after we have actually investigated the matter."
Saying that, Zead looked at Hermes.
"And that is why I am currently preparing the transport plane to depart. I will leave the piloting to you, Hermes."
"At this point, we know very little about the details of the situation, other than that five bases have been completely destroyed and that no survivors have been confirmed. We will first fly to Berlin and receive information from the emergency investigation headquarters set up by the German military. We will then fly to the site and conduct a field investigation of the destroyed bases."
The transport plane, ready for deployment, took off hurriedly from the HQ airfield, and after Hermes switched the controls to automatic, Zead told the two of us. This time, unlike when we flew from France to HQ, both Zead and I were in the cockpit with the pilot. Then, with a slightly dissatisfied look on her face, Hermes asked Zead,
"Are the Germans starting an investigation separately from us?"
"Of course. It was a German military base that was destroyed."
Zead responded with a serious face.
"If anything, we are the ones who are the irregulars. Apparently Prime Minister Noland proposed to send Durandal, but the German Chancellor didn't look too pleased."
"Prime Minister Noland is the British Prime Minister, right?"
When I asked, Zead nodded slightly.
"That's right. The news of the destruction of the German military base was urgently reported to the leaders of the EC countries, and a video conference was quickly held. According to EC regulations, the summit can temporarily exercise the authority of the EC parliament if necessary, so it was able to issue an official order to Durandal."
"But if there's any talk of investigations or audits in the German army, you can't help but think of Brigadier General Glaser and Blauer Nebel. I don't want anything to do with those guys."
Hermes groaned, grimacing. Zead then gave a laugh that seemed a little more bitter than his usual one.
"That's a big hit. It seems that the head of the emergency investigation headquarters in Berlin is Brigadier General Glaser."

"Wow, I thought so!"
"I wouldn't be happy at all if this prediction came true," Hermes exclaimed, clutching his head in exaggerated excitement. Zead then turned to me, who had been listening to the story somewhat stunned, and explained.
"Brigadier General Glaser of the German Army is the commander of the Special Task Force Blauer Nebel. Although he can be a little too cold-hearted, he is a capable and energetic soldier. However, he doesn't seem to get along well with Hermes."
"It's not as simple as saying we don't get along! Just thinking about his cold-hearted, Frankenstein-like face gives me goosebumps! It's a physiological rejection reaction!"
"It's not just goosebumps, it's like I've got hives," Hermes said, scratching his chest.
"And to say he's a little too cold-hearted is a gross understatement! I don't think it would be too much to call him a cold-hearted sadist, the epitome of tyranny and arrogance, a typical fascist soldier with a penchant for power and racism."
"You're free to think that, but we shouldn't give Elsa any preconceived notions."
I responded calmly, and Zead looked at me again.
"We won't know whether the German military will be cooperative or not until we get there, but either way, we must carry out our mission in our own way and achieve results. If we don't take this opportunity to prove to the EC countries that Durandal is a useful organization, we won't be able to attract new members, let alone have a future, seriously."
"yes"
I nodded, my expression serious. However, the situation was direr than I had imagined.
"To put it bluntly, your interference is nothing but a nuisance to us. We cannot hand over any information unless it is decided by the EC summit, so we would like to ask you to leave Germany immediately."
Brigadier General Glaser, head of the German military's emergency investigation headquarters, gazed upon Zead with cold, shining eyes and spoke arrogantly. Zead was by no means short, but in front of Glaser he looked a little stocky. He was nearly two meters tall, with shoulder width and a deep chest that matched his height, and his head was completely shaved, with barely any eyebrows. The German Brigadier General, with a monstrous appearance and a frowning face that seemed to indicate the height of sulkiness, would have made a timid child cry just by looking at him.
"...just like a frost giant."
Hermes called Glaser a Frankenstein monster, but I thought of the Germanic god Jotunheim, a frost giant who always has a gloomy expression and is a resident of the

frozen world in the tale of the Frost Giant. In mythology, it is said that the frost giant never smiles until the day they attack the heavens in the final war of the world, but it is just as hard to imagine Brigadier General Glaser smiling. And Zead spoke to the frost giant... no, Brigadier General Glaser, in a tone full of sincerity.
"Of course, we have no intention of hindering the German military's investigation, and we will be sure to share any information we obtain with you. But still, is our presence a nuisance?"
"That's right. As you know, I am always careful to maintain confidentiality. Whether intentionally or accidentally, if important information were to leak out, no matter what organization it is, it would be impossible for it to function properly."
Staring fixedly at Zead, Glaser continued speaking in a raspy voice. His gaze was not just cold, but seemed to me to be filled with some intense malice.
"I don't necessarily think that my subordinates are perfect when it comes to maintaining secrecy, but I have done my best. At the very least, as far as I can see, they are trustworthy. However, unfortunately, the subordinates you are currently in charge of are completely untrustworthy. After all, they are a mixed bag of civilians and foreigners. It would be impossible to trust any decent soldier."
"Thank you for your kind words, but I trust my subordinates. They are not soldiers who were assigned to my position based on a simple order, but subordinates I chose myself."
Meeting Glaser's gaze directly, Zead responded calmly and dignifiedly.
"No matter what their background or nationality, I guarantee that all members of Durandal are worthy of complete trust."
"Your guarantee is worthless."
Glaser spoke in a voice filled with cold venom.
"It's up to you whether you trust your subordinates or not. However, I don't have much faith in your ability to judge people. I've had bad experiences like that before."
"It's unfortunate that you don't believe us, Your Excellency, but we too must carry out the mission we were ordered to perform by the EC Summit. If you tell us that you cannot hand over any information to Durandal because we suspect it of leaking classified information, we will report that to you and begin our own investigation."
Without changing his tone at all, Zead countered head-on. Glaser responded bitterly.
"I have no intention of going against the decision of the EC summit. Although I am reluctant, I will hand over the information. However, if any leaks occur, you will be held responsible."
"At your discretion."

Zead responded calmly, and a small man who seemed to be Glazer's secretary handed him a file on a data disk. If it was prepared from the beginning, he should have just handed it over without being nasty, I thought, without saying a word. Zead then took the data disk with a slight bow, and asked Glazer in a matter-of-fact tone.
"By the way, we would like to go to the site and investigate. Do you have permission?"
"Even if I don't give my permission, if you use the decision of the EC summit as a pretext, I won't be able to stop Durandal's research. Do as you like."
Glaser responded with a look of bitterness on his face. However, since this person had been wearing that expression from the beginning, it was unclear whether he was angry or not.
"However, my subordinate, Blauer Nebel, is currently investigating the matter. I will explain the situation to them, but please do not get in their way. So, which of the five locations are you planning to go to?"
"First, let's go to Saxony-Anhalt. The base there is the largest, if I remember correctly."
In response to Zead's reply, Glazer nodded with no amusement.
"That's right. I also sent Major Wagner, commander of Blauer Nebel, there."
"I see. In that case, please give my best regards to the Major."
"Well then, I'm sorry to bother you during your busy schedule," said Zead as he was about to leave.
"By the way, is that girl your secretary? Or is she a member of Durandal?"
Glaser asked out of nowhere and my heart skipped a beat, but Zead answered calmly and without fuss.
"We have a new member in our team, Elsa Eliane. Before coming to Durandal, she was one of the best Wanzer pilots in the French army."
"Hmm, so you're from the French Wanzers unit, who've never seen combat before?"
Glaser spoke without even trying to hide his disdain.
"Still, as an EC citizen with military experience, he may be one of the more respectable of your subordinates. Well, you should do your best not to cause trouble for the German army, and not to embarrass His Excellency the British Prime Minister who went to the trouble of recommending you."
"Yes, since I have accepted the mission, I intend to do my best and do my best."
For a moment I thought that Zead would continue, "You don't need to be told by His Excellency the Brigadier General," but instead he urged me on.
"Let's go, Elsa."

"yes"
As I turned to leave, Glaser suddenly spoke up again.
"Hey, you."
"Yes, what is it?"
This time, he answered with courage, and Glaser spoke in a sarcastic tone.
"You probably don't know this, but when he was in the British army, he was called Gide the Grim Reaper. If you don't want to die young, it would be best for you to return to the French army as soon as possible."
"......excuse me"
Careful not to let the anger show on my face, I quickly retreated from the malicious frost giant.
"Well, I thought it would turn out like this."
On the transport plane heading from Berlin to the site in Saxony-Anhalt, Zead was dazzled and gave a wry smile.
"But Glaser has gotten old. He wasn't the kind of man to make pointless remarks. It seems he was extremely upset that we, or rather, that I had come to investigate."
"At best, make him angry. Then maybe he'll cut a blood vessel in his brain and collapse. That would be great."
"Well, he's not the kind of guy that would die from something like that," Hermes groaned. So, although I wasn't completely without hesitation, I decided to ask Zead.
"Um, have you known the Brigadier General for some time?"
"Yeah, it's been almost twenty years since we first met. In a way, we may have become the worst kind of friends."
With a wry smile, Zead nodded.
"I was in the British special forces for a long time, and was often involved in incidents overseas. And Glaser was in the German special forces, and he was always in a similar position to me, but a little higher than me. It's still the same now, but Britain and Germany have been allies of the EC for a long time, but there was an internal struggle for leadership. Putting aside personal likes and dislikes, Glaser and I were often at odds on position. There were a few times when we worked together to solve incidents, but as a result, rather than friendship or reconciliation, new grudges were born. It's unfortunate, but there's nothing we can do about it. They called me Zead the Grim Reaper, but we called him the Monster Glaser, so I guess it's a draw, or maybe we're just as bad."
"No matter who you are or where you look at him, Glazer is nothing but a monster."
Hermes interjected annoyed.

"Besides, looking at the records from that time, several of Glaser's subordinates were killed in the line of duty, and the number of those who retired due to injuries or mental health issues was far greater in the German special forces. There's absolutely no reason for Zead to be called the Grim Reaper."
"Still, it's true that I lose colleagues and subordinates quite frequently. You could say it's the fate of a special forces unit that exposes itself to danger, but I can't help but be called the Grim Reaper."
Zead responded in a matter-of-fact tone.
"I believe that if the British Special Forces had been more proactive in introducing Wanzers, many of these tragedies could have been prevented, but there's no point in regretting what's happened in the past. We should think about the future."
"So, this is the investigation information that the monster Glazer handed over to me after all that effort. To be honest, it's old and unconfirmed, so it's unlikely to be of any use. In fact, this morning's news had more details about it."
Zead grinned at the indignant Hermes.
"If all they've received is stale, unconfirmed information, then even Glaser can't blame them for leaking it. If they've received any useful, valuable, top-secret information, I think that's far more frightening."
"But it's no use, what can I do?"
Hermes, with an irritated look on his face, took out the corpse. Oh, he's unexpectedly impatient, even though the field investigation hasn't even started yet, I thought, widening my eyes. Perhaps it was the adverse effects of the Glaser allergy. Then Zead's expression tightened and he spoke in a stern tone.
"Calm down, Hermes. No matter who you're dealing with, information you receive from others is only secondary. We need to investigate the area from now on, gather information on our own, and produce results. If you're too concerned about the movements of the German army and Glaser and neglect your own work, then that would be putting the cart before the horse."
"Well, that's true."
As she spoke, Hermes scratched her head with an unsatisfied look on her face, when suddenly the autopilot emitted a notification sound indicating that the input destination was approaching.
"Oops, no good. We need to prepare for landing."
Shrugging, Hermes headed for the controls, where she saw several plumes of black and grey smoke rising from the ground.
"This is terrible."

Looking down at the completely destroyed German military base from the sky, Zead was dazzled with a sense of reality.
"The commander has contacted us regarding your visit."
Major Wagner, commander of the German Special Task Force Blauer Nebel, spoke to us over the communication screen in a rather melancholic tone.
"However, we are currently conducting an investigation at this base. We ask that you refrain from interfering with our investigation."
"I understand that point, as instructed by Chief Glaser."
When Zead responds, Wagner, without changing his expression, makes a shocking announcement.
"In that case, please don't get off the transport. Just wandering around an unexplored area is enough to interfere with our investigation."
"What?! That's stupid!"
Stopping Hermes who blurted out something without thinking, Zead spoke to Wagner in a patient tone.
"That request cannot be accepted. We were sent here to investigate on a mission from the EC summit. We cannot conduct a proper investigation without even going to the site."
"We will give you priority in letting you know the results of our investigation. Are you dissatisfied?"
Asked in a flat tone, Zead replied immediately.
"We are not satisfied. We have the power and the obligation to conduct our own investigation."
"I don't think a bunch of amateurs would find anything out of their own investigation."
Wagner spoke words that could only be interpreted as mocking. Unlike the imposing giant Glaser, Wagner's appearance on the communication screen was so neat and tidy that it gave off a slightly artificial impression. And the malice and venom that Glaser exuded so strongly could not be felt from this person. I thought that to Wagner, our existence was merely a nuisance not worth paying special attention to. Wagner thought for a moment, and then calmly spoke.
"Then, I will allow you to conduct your own investigation, limited to the locations and materials we have already investigated. However, careless changes to the status quo are strictly prohibited. If you wish to carry out even the slightest destructive analysis of the materials, please request it here. If we deem it necessary, we will analyze it and provide you with the results."
"You've got to be kidding me! How can you do research without doing your own

analysis?"
Hermes, the analyst, yelled in an exasperated voice. Wagner then asked in a very depressed tone:
"That's surprising. Are you saying that Blauer Nebel's analysis is unreliable?"
And without waiting for a response, he continues.
"In any case, this is the maximum concession we can make. If these conditions are not accepted, we will ask you to leave immediately and will use force to remove you if you do not comply."
"Is that a threat?"
When Zead asked sharply, Wagner answered calmly.
"No. I don't make empty threats. I always carry out what I say I will do. If anyone is dissatisfied with my response, I have no problem with them taking their complaint to the EC summit or to the British Prime Minister. I have done nothing wrong. I would rather have this matter settled in a public forum."
"Uh huh."
Zead groaned as he glared at Wagner's aristocratic beauty, but he must have decided that things wouldn't get any better if things continued like this. He responded without even trying to hide the bitterness in his tone.
"We have no choice but to accept your conditions. However, we will officially report to the EC summit and parliament the fact that you have imposed conditions limiting on-site investigations."
"Very well. I will then send you a list of the locations and materials we have investigated. That's all."
With that, Wagner hung up the communication. At the same time, Hermes furiously attacked Zead.
"Why did you accept such unreasonable conditions, Zead? How can you investigate something when you can't even analyze the documents? It's ridiculous!"
"But if we had not accepted the terms, Major Wagner would have had no qualms about firing his guns to drive us away. He was definitely serious."
Zead responded with an expression that could be described as sorrowful.
"The last time I met him, he was a quiet, reserved young man, not that noticeable considering his appearance. But this man called Wagner has transformed himself beautifully. If he's not careful, he could be even more formidable than the monster Glaser."
"If Glaser is the Frankenstein monster, then the tougher and more handsome Wagner must be some kind of vampire. Does the German army have a collection of

shape-shifting monsters?"
Hermes cracked a joke to try and vent his anger, probably knowing full well that he had no other way to deal with the situation.
"So, what should we do?"
"Once we receive the list from Blauer Nebel, we will begin our on-site investigation immediately. No matter how limited and incomplete the investigation, it is better to do it than not to do it at all."
Zead replied immediately and looked at me.
"You never know what's going to happen. We'll use a Wanzer to investigate. Have it ready so you can leave at any time."
"yes"
Feeling nervous, I nodded. Yes, this was a battlefield in a sense, and enemy territory at that.
"This is troubling. I'm completely at a loss."
Hermes sighed deeply and groaned.
"Well, I'm prohibited from collecting data or analyzing it myself, so there's nothing I can do about it."
"But some things have become quite clear."
Zead responded while looking at the data displayed on the monitor.
"In particular, the fact that the remains of several Wanzers that were not German in origin were found abandoned at the scene is extremely significant. It's direct evidence that it was a Wanzer unit that destroyed the base."
"Well, that's true. But we can estimate that much from the extent of the damage. The question is, what kind of Wanzer was responsible for destroying that German base?"
Hermes growled in annoyance.
"The Blauer Nebel analysts say that it's impossible to identify the country of origin due to the extent of damage to the wreckage, but I don't think that's reasonable. We should be able to get a lot of information from even a single remaining chip or part."
"However, the fact that the attackers abandoned the remains without recovering them suggests that they are confident that their identity will not be identified even if thoroughly analyzed. I did request that we analyze it directly, but to be honest, I don't think there was any cutting corners in Blauer Nebel's analysis."
Zead continued speaking with a thoughtful look on his face.
"According to the documents, it's highly likely that the abandoned Wanzers had powerful self-destruct mechanisms built into each of their joints, and they've barely retained their original form. They were probably disposed of meticulously so as not to

leave a single chip or part intact."
"It seems that fragments of what appears to be completely charred human remains were found in the cockpit wreckage. Did the self-destruct mechanism go off because the pilot didn't escape and was killed in action, or did the aircraft become inoperable and the pilot choose to self-destruct rather than escape? Either way, it's a terrible story."
Growling, Hermes' expression became more and more bitter.
"Normally, the only time a Wanzer pilot is killed in battle is when they escape from a disabled unit and are caught up in a Wanzer battle and die. But it seems this Wanzer doesn't even have an escape mechanism, which is quite shocking."
"It is believed that the unit that carried out the attack shot the pilots who escaped from German Wanzers, along with their escape gear, massacring every single one of them. They appear to have had no regard for the lives of others or their own."
Saying that, Zead sighed deeply.
"However, it is true that special infiltration units in all military forces operate on similar principles, although to varying degrees. Eliminate your target and take no prisoners. Eliminate witnesses where possible, even if they are non-combatants. Then, if you are about to be captured, commit suicide. They are a symbol of the dark side of the military, but the British Army does have such units. Fortunately, as far as I know, they have never been deployed in actual combat."
"So, this attack was carried out by some military force, or rather, a national organization?"
When I asked, Zead nodded with a sad expression.
"First of all, there's no doubt about it. I can't say that there aren't any private organizations in the world that have the power to carry out such a large-scale and well-thought-out attack, but at least there are none that are active within the EC region. That being said, it's possible that the perpetrator of the attack is a member of a so-called international terrorist organization, but even in that case, it would be impossible unless they had the full support of a certain country."
"Either way, there's not enough data to go any further, data!"
Hermes slammed the desk violently and shouted.
"Even though the Wanzer left behind by the attackers is right in front of us, we can't even touch it! How ridiculous!"
"But no matter how much we protest; I don't think Wagner will change his mind."
Zead shook his head in response.
"While Elsa and I were investigating the permitted locations, there was always at

least one Blauer Nebel Wanzer standing guard. If we did anything strange, it felt like they would open fire on us immediately."
"What tyrannical, stubborn Germans!"
Hermes was getting increasingly indignant, but no matter how angry he got, nothing would change. Then Zead turned to me and asked,
"Well then, Elsa. Do you have any ideas for a solution?"
"That's true. If the other person's attitude doesn't change, then perhaps we should try changing our target instead."
As I organize my thoughts, I slowly begin to speak.
"In terms of who the attackers are, I think it will be difficult to narrow it down beyond the possibility that they are some national organization, possibly a Wanzer unit trained for special infiltration operations. The attackers will probably do a great job of disguising themselves."
"HM"
Zead nodded, so I continued speaking.
"However, there are many mysteries surrounding the attackers other than just who they were. How did they get close to the base without being noticed, and how did they succeed in their attack? And after destroying the base, how did they disappear, where did they go, and where are they now? Why not try to deduce these points?"
"I see. So the focus isn't on who did it, but how they did it."
Nodding again, Zead asks me.
"So, do you have any theories?"
"Yes. This might be a bit long-winded, but please hear me out."
So I began to explain.
"Normally, when we think of a surprise or sudden attack by a Wanzer unit, the first thing that comes to mind is an airborne drop from a transport plane, but it is quite far-fetched to think that this attack unit was transported by aircraft. This is because all five destroyed bases belonged to the army, and the air force, which plays a major role in protecting German airspace, was completely unharmed both before and after the attack. It is believed that ultra-high performance stealth transport planes capable of slipping through the surveillance of the German air force were used.
That's possible, but even if that's the case, if they're sending troops in from the air, the first place they should attack would be the air base."
"That's certainly true."
Hermes' anger seemed to have subsided, as she nodded with a relatively calm expression.

"The air surveillance radars installed at German air bases are the best in the world when it comes to monitoring aircraft, and after news of the destruction of the bases came in, they've also sent in air patrol planes. At the very least, if they were to try to use aircraft to recover an assault force, I think they'd be detected no matter how stealthy their planes were."
"I see. If we invade by aircraft, there's no point in having the aircraft retrieve us when we retreat."
Zead groaned as well, supporting his chin with his hand.
"In that case, it would have been necessary to strike down the German air force before the withdrawal, but in fact it was an army base that was attacked, not an air base. In other words, it is natural to assume that aircraft were not used in the invasion or withdrawal from the start."
"Yes, that's right."
Seeing as they both seemed to understand, I continued my explanation.
"Also, although it's a bit weak to call it circumstantial evidence, I feel that the reason the attackers abandoned the Wanzer was because they needed to retreat by land. Even if they had carefully prepared to make it self-destruct, it would have been better to retrieve it if possible. Moreover, the base that was attacked had been destroyed, so it wasn't in a position to be pursued immediately."
"I see"
Zead nodded, but then Hermes raised an objection.
"Ah, but wait a moment. When you say the Wanzers retreated by land on their own, you don't mean armed Wanzers retreating on foot along the Autobahn or something, right? Even if it was the middle of the night, I don't think that would be possible."
"Yes, I think they probably have a trailer for transporting Wanzers near the base. If we disguise it a bit, it will look like a normal large trailer, right?"
Hermes looked convinced by my answer.
"Ah, I see. It's true that a trailer wouldn't be as conspicuous as the Wanzer itself. Besides, a Wanzer transport trailer like the ones we have today can only be disguised so as not to attract attention, and a Wanzer with such extensive damage can't be loaded onto it, so the only option is to have it self-destruct and then abandon it. It looks like this will be fine."
"Well, it's still just a hypothesis, but it's a pretty strong one."
Saying that, Jed looked at me.
"The assembly and withdrawal at the attack site can be explained by using trailer trucks to travel overland. However, when invading EC territory from the outside, you

can't have a line of disguised trailer trucks carrying Wanzers. Currently, the EC has restrictions on imports from outside its territory, so if you did something like that, you would definitely stand out."
"You don't have to force your way in all at once. You can just spread out your intrusions at different times and places so as not to draw attention."
Hermes pointed this out, but Zead shook his head.
"No, the more they spread out, the greater the risk. If even one of them is discovered by customs, it will completely upend the whole plan. Sending in the Wanzers too early is also risky, considering the need to conceal it afterwards. If it were me, I would avoid it at all costs."
"Hmm, so the land route is no good."
Hermes tilted her head, dazzling her.
"But if we're going to bring in Wanzers in an aircraft, we'll just make it an airborne operation from the start, right?"
"That's right. If we can break through the EC border, where anti-aircraft surveillance is the strictest, we should be able to penetrate to a point where we can attack the target directly. It seems nonsense to take the trouble to transport the Wanzers by air and not carry out an airborne operation."
As I responded, I switched the display on the monitor to a map of the entire EC.
"If they can't travel by land or air, the only option left is by sea. I don't know much about the EC's maritime defenses, but is it too much to assume that they transported the Wanzers by submarine, landed them somewhere on the coast of EC territory, and then transported them overland to the German military base using trailers?"
"That depends on the landing site."
Zead announced, staring intently at the map.
"Surveillance of the EC coastline is just as strict as that of the air. In particular, an almost impenetrable surveillance network has been constructed in the Atlantic Ocean, with the Iberia Megafloat as an outpost. To the north, bases in The Hague, Kiel, Rostock, and Gdansk, and to the south, bases in Mallorca, Corsica, Malta, and Crete, are keeping a watchful eye over the Mediterranean Sea. Is there really a place where a large number of Wanzers could slip through this surveillance network and secretly land on EC territory?"
"That's right. I don't think there is a beach here that isn't monitored by any base, at least according to official data. If they were to leave such an unmonitored beach as it is, the EC Navy would just be stupid."
"Yes," Hermes said sarcastically, as she brought up new data. The areas covered by

each base monitoring the coastline were displayed as circles with the base at the center, and were overlaid on the EC map. Hermes looked at the display and nodded slightly.
"Yes, after all, the officially designated surveillance areas of each base completely cover the EC coastline. There are quite a few areas where surveillance overlaps between two neighboring bases. In theory, there are no gaps anywhere."
Saying that, Hermes turned her gaze back to Zead and me and continued.
"But in reality, don't you think that in areas where there is supposed to be overlapping surveillance, there are times when the surveillance is weak? Maybe both sides assume that this area is safe because the neighboring base is also monitoring it."
"Well, I wonder."
Zead responded with a wry smile.
"However, even if we hold out at this base any longer, it will be difficult to achieve results that surpass those of Blauer Nebel's investigation. If there is even the slightest possibility of catching a clue about the attacker, we should take action."
"Then it's settled!"
cried Hermes, genuinely happy.
"So, where should we start? Maybe we should start from the nearby north side?"
"That's right. The borders within the EC are less heavily regulated and inspected than the borders with other countries, but that doesn't mean you get a free pass. The fewer borders you have to cross before entering Germany, the better."
As I responded, Zead added more.
"Also, of the four bases monitoring the northern coast, The Hague, Rostock, and Gdansk are bases of the EC Allied Navy, but Kiel is managed by the German Navy. That's why Kiel is said to have relatively poor coordination with the other bases."
"I see. Well then, let's start by looking at this."
When Hermes operated the key, the color of the surveillance area under Keel Base's jurisdiction changed.
"Just how nasty is that vampire Wagner!"
As soon as the transport took off and the controls were switched to automatic, Hermes shouted in an exasperated voice.
"Well, the German base is their territory, so I can understand why they're making a fuss about it. But wherever we go away from the base, it's up to us!"
"Well, don't get so upset. Even if we set aside prejudice, it's an indisputable fact that we are a nuisance to them."

Zead responded in a soothing tone. But even so, I found Wagner's attitude unpleasant and puzzling. He acted as if to tell them to just get out and not conduct their own investigation, and yet the moment Hermes asked for permission to take off, he came on the air traffic controller's behalf and asked Durandal if he was going to stop his investigation, and if not, where he was going and what he was going to do, almost like an interrogation.
"Currently, we are putting all our efforts into investigating and analyzing the attacked base, but we do not believe that this alone will be enough to grasp the full picture of the attack. It is highly likely that we will need to conduct further detailed investigations in various areas in the future, but when that happens, we would be in trouble if you make any careless contact beforehand and evidence and traces disappear."
When Gide protested, asking why he had to be asked such a question, Wagner responded calmly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.
"Unfortunately, I do not have the authority to stop you from doing whatever you like outside of this base, calling it your own investigation. So at the very least, I will confirm where you plan to go and what you plan to do, contact the relevant parties if possible, and request that you take all possible measures to preserve evidence."
"In that case, I will send you a list of the areas we plan to investigate, so you can do as you wish. However, since our investigations extend beyond Germany, I don't know if your request will be granted."
With that, Zead hung up the phone and sent the list. Soon after, we received permission to take off, and promptly left the German military base behind.
"Will Wagner really contact the people involved?"
When I suddenly noticed someone looking at me, Zead picked up on it with keen ears and turned to look my way.
"Are you worried about someone interfering with your investigation?"
"Yes, even though Wagner doesn't have direct authority over us, if, for example, the base commander in Kiel were to ask us to sabotage Durandal, it could become a troublesome situation."
When I responded, Zead nodded slightly.
"I understand your concerns. But I don't think it will cause any noticeable disruption. I don't think there are many people who would be as forceful as Wagner when it comes to us, who have come to investigate on the orders of the EC summit. Besides, this isn't limited to the German military, but the army and navy have traditionally not been on good terms. Furthermore, because their commander, Glaser, is quite forceful, the

Special Task Force feels isolated even within the German army, who are supposed to be their own people. If a request came from this unpopular person to the naval base to disrupt the investigation of Durandal, it would be more likely that they would cooperate as a spiteful gesture."
"That's a good thing for us."
Hermes interjected with a grin, but Zead didn't laugh; instead, he glared thoughtfully.
"Even Wagner should be well aware of the fact that Blauer Nebel was isolated within the German army. Why did he say such a thing?"
"Isn't that just empty intimidation? I think it's common for people who say arrogantly, 'I don't make empty threats,' to actually be all lip service."
Hermes replied lightly, but Zead's expression remained unconvinced as he pondered.
Eventually, the transport plane reached the airspace near Kiel Base. Zead then contacted the base and said he wanted the coastline surveillance records as research material. Although not exactly happy, the data was sent back without any problems.
"It was just an empty threat after all."
Hermes declared as she checked the data that had been sent.
"I'm willing to bet that Wagner hasn't contacted the Kiel base at all."
"It seems that's the case."
Zead responded, still not convinced. I too couldn’t connect my impression of Wagner with the empty threat, and I started to think about it.
"Wagner said that he would contact the relevant parties if possible. However, if by relevant parties he meant Kiel Base and other German military units, then regardless of whether his request would be granted, it was not impossible for him to make contact. Who exactly were the relevant parties he had in mind? I thought that perhaps Wagner, like Zead, had his own network of contacts, and that there were people in various parts of the military who could be expected to cooperate, separate from the military chain of command. If that was the case, then no matter how much people disliked Glaser and Blauer Nebel were, there was a possibility that someone would unexpectedly side with Wagner and trip us up. Fortunately, it seemed that there were no such people at Kiel Base... But just then, Hermes, who had been checking the data, suddenly shouted, interrupting my thoughts.
"Zead, Elsa, look at this!"
"what up?"
Zead asked while peering at the monitor, and Hermes quickly explained.
"If you look closely at the surveillance situation on the western coast of the Danish

Jutland Peninsula, you can see a huge hole! This area is within the surveillance zone of The Hague base, and I'm sure the Danish military is patrolling there as well, but even so, this is really lazy!"
"Yes, it's true, compared to the German coastline, the surveillance network here is much looser."
Looking at the data Hermes pointed out, Zead groaned.
"What's more, even if something unusual was detected, the base simply contacted The Hague and the Danish Navy, and the Kiel base itself did not conduct any follow-up checks whatsoever. I'm sure there must have been some reason behind it, but this is certainly an attractive target for anyone plotting an intrusion."
"And unlike top secret information that can only be found by visiting the site, this big hole can be easily deduced from general information! Whether it's the EC Navy or the German Navy, either way, this is a big idiot!"
Hermes shouted in an exasperated tone. Zead quickly responded.
"Let's go there right away. It's not certain that the people who attacked the German base landed here, but it's quite possible."
"OK!"
Hermes headed to the controls, and the transport quickly flew off to Jutland.
"How is it going? Any feedback on Wanzers or large trailers in operation?"
Hermes asked impatiently as we flew the transport plane at a low altitude and slow speed, close to the limit permitted by EC aviation regulations. Of course, if either Zead, who was glaring at the monitor, or I, had any reaction, we would have said something immediately, so there was no reaction as long as we remained silent, but as a pilot, it seemed he couldn't help but ask. And Zead answered dutifully.
"There's been no response to the Wanzers. It's hard to say anything about trailers, because if they're parked they're indistinguishable from factories, but I haven't seen any moving around."
"Yes. There are currently no vehicles on the road big enough and powerful enough to carry a Wanzer."
Hermes makes a disappointed noise as I continue.
"Hmm, maybe I was mistaken after all?"
"It's too early to make such a decision. Even if it landed around here, it's possible that the Wanzers that went to Germany haven't returned yet."
Zead responded, staring at the monitor.
"It's possible that they've already withdrawn, but it seems like they're running out of time. No matter how lax the navy's surveillance is, bringing a submarine close to the

shore in the middle of the day, loading it onto a Wanzer taken off a trailer and making their escape would be way too conspicuous. If a private plane or something happened to be passing nearby, they'd be in full view."
"Oh, I see. So, if we want to get to the scene, would it be best for us to come and investigate later at night?"
In response to Hermes' question, Zead nodded with a straight face.
"That's right. The most ideal thing would be to find some traces during the day and pinpoint the landing point. Then, with the cooperation of Kiel Base and the Danish military, we'd like to set up a complete encirclement by sea, land and air, and then wait for the enemy to arrive at night. But that's not going to go so smoothly... Snack?"
"Any reaction?"
Hermes asked enthusiastically, to which Zead responded calmly.
"At the northern edge of the detection area, along the coast, there was a signal that seemed to be from an operational Wanzer. However, it wasn't a very strong signal. It might be a small work craft."
"Oh? So it's a civilian plane?"
Hermes uttered a cry of disappointment, but Zead's expression hardened and he shook his head.
"No, there are no normal Wanzerlists used by the EC, both civilian and military, that elicit this reaction. It's an unidentified unit."
"Hmm, it's possible that it's a modified machine made by some enthusiast. Anyway, let's try approaching it and making contact."
Saying this, Hermes sent the transport flying north. At the same time, a new bright spot appeared on the monitor.
"Ah, there's another reaction. And then one after that... so far, three have been confirmed."
"The strength of the reaction is similar for all three units."
At the very least, it doesn't seem to be equipped with surface-to-air missiles mounted on Wanzers, Zead whispered. If they were to be targeted with such things, transport planes would be no match for them.
"I tried calling out on both civilian and military frequencies, but no response. I think I'll try using the megaphone when we get a little closer... Done!"
Suddenly, Hermes let out a shriek and the transport plane rocketed upwards.
"Oh my goodness! They suddenly started firing machine guns!"
"What about the damage?"
Zead asked without a moment's hesitation, and Hermes glanced at the instruments

and replied immediately.
"I managed to avoid it! I may have been slightly hit, but all functions are normal!"
"Okay, let's contact the Danish military. There's no need to go down there and take the risk."
Zead calmly gave orders while staring at the monitor at the small Wanzers that were constantly firing from the ground. However, Hermes replied in a panicked tone.
"No good, I can't communicate with the Danish military! It seems they're jamming!"
"What did you say?"
Zead's expression suddenly became grim.
"Elsa, can you sense where the jamming signal is coming from?"
"Yes, I'll try."
The short answer is; I operate the machine.
"We were able to detect it. The source of the signal is located ten kilometers offshore in the ocean. There is no sign of a ship, so we believe it may be a submarine that has surfaced just above the surface of the sea."
"I see. If we escape, they plan to approach the coast, capture the Wanzer, and then retreat."
Zead groaned, frowning.
“Either way, even if we notify the Danish military or Kiel base now, it will be virtually impossible to capture the submarine. So, we should at least secure the Wanzer ourselves.”
"Are you going to land a transport plane where they're shooting at you?"
Hermes' voice was a little shaky, but Zead responded calmly.
"No, we don't need to land a transport plane within range of the machine gun; we can just airdrop a Wanzer and we'll be able to do something. Elsa, can you do that?"
"yes"
He asked me, and I answered without hesitation. When I was in the French army, I had done airborne parachute training several times, jumping off a Wanzer from a transport plane in the air. This was my first time to parachute while the enemy was firing at me, but it was extremely difficult to aim at a falling target and fire from the ground. It was not easy to hit a target unless there were a large number of enemies in formation laying down a barrage of bullets. I thought I would be fine, I could do it, but contrary to my intentions, my face seemed to be quite twitching. When Zead saw my face, his expression turned worried and he asked again.
"Well, this was your first time in real combat. Are you okay?"
"Don't worry, I can do it."

I said as firmly as possible. Zead's expression tightened as he nodded.
“Very well, then please board the Wanzer and prepare for an airborne drop. I’ll go with you. Hermes, I’ll leave the piloting to you.”
Without further ado, Zead stormed out of the cockpit and headed for the hangar, and I followed after him.
"Elsa, should I go first?"
Once the Wanzer check was complete and it was time to descend, Zead called out to me. I think he was concerned about me as it was my first battle, but the unit Zead was piloting was a support-type Wild Goat equipped with missiles on both shoulders. Although he did have knuckles as a melee weapon, he was by no means the type to charge headfirst into the enemy.
"No, I'll go down first and put pressure on the enemy. I'd appreciate it if you could provide some support."
"I see. Don't push yourself."
With Zead's voice in my ears, I head towards the end of the hangar, the airborne landing area, in my vantage point. The mech I'm piloting is a Zenith that's been specially tuned with Durandal, just like yesterday, but the bullets loaded into the weapons in both of my hands aren't training rounds, they're real ammunition.
"Cargo bay, all green. Airborne drop, preparations underway."
As Hermes' voice rang out, the tension in her voice evident, the door at the rear of the transport plane opened. Up until this point, it was no different from the previous training, but the problem was that from the ground, machine gun fire was being fired, accompanied by a loud noise.
"Countdown, five, four, three, two, one, descend!"
At Hermes' signal, I launched the Wanzer into the air. From the ground, small Wanzers armed with machine guns began to attack violently, but for some reason, I didn't feel like they would be able to hit us.
"In fact, the real battle begins after we land!"
As I readied the Wanzer in the air, I felt dizzy. Apparently some experienced Wanzer pilots from the USN and OCU launch attacks while descending, but I had neither the motivation nor the confidence to go that far. If by some chance the recoil from the shot caused me to lose balance and fail to land, it would all be for naught. With a heavy thud, the Wanzer landed. If this were training, I would have checked to see if the shock of the descent had caused any malfunctions, but now was no time for such leisurely things. Right in front of me was an enemy aiming its machine gun at me.
"Now!"

Without even aiming, I fired the machine gun and shotgun simultaneously from both hands on the Wanzer. The machine gun missed its target, but the light and small enemy Wanzer was hit directly by the shotgun at close range, and was literally blown away and slammed into the ground. Normally, after receiving this much damage, the escape mechanism would automatically function and eject the pilot from the Wanzer, but this enemy was different. The enemy Wanzer that was slammed into the ground instantly erupted in flames from its entire body, then exploded spectacularly, shattering into pieces. I don't know what would have happened to the enemy pilot from my attack, but there was no way he would be saved.
"Shoes!"
It's not that I hadn't expected this, but when a suicide bomber actually happens right in front of me, it's still quite a shock. I was careless and was late in taking evasive action, and my plane was hit directly by the blast. What's more, just as I lost my balance and stumbled, a second enemy plane quickly charged in, firing its machine gun wildly, as if not even caring about its comrade's suicide. I did my best to dodge and return fire with my machine gun, but perhaps my aim was poor and I couldn't hit it. Then a third enemy plane attacked from the side.
"First up, Re!"
I gritted my teeth, thinking I was being caught in a pincer attack. Although the enemy was a lightweight, small Wanzer, it was equipped with the same machine guns as those used in combat. If I was hit by concentrated fire from two planes at once, I certainly wouldn't survive. But the next moment, the enemy to my side exploded and was blown away. For a moment, I thought it had committed suicide, but it seemed that Zead, who had descended after me, had fired a missile and made a direct hit on the enemy Wanzer.
"......amazing"
I had seen Wanzers fire missiles many times in the past, and had even participated in mock battles with missile-equipped units. But to be honest, until now I had never really realized that the missiles used in real combat had such lethal power in one hit. And the last remaining enemy must have realized that things were not going well. It tried to close the gap and run towards Zead's unit to block the missiles. However, doing so would inevitably mean that it would have its back to my unit.
"I won't let you do that!"
As I sprinted forward in my Wanzer, I aimed the shotgun at the enemy plane's legs, which had turned away from me. As expected, the light and small Wanzer's fragile legs were rendered inoperable with one hit, and the enemy plane stopped moving as

it leaned forward. However, the enemy plane still tried to turn around and aim the machine gun at me, but I got close to it first, and pointed the shotgun at the enemy plane's chest.
"Drop your weapons and surrender!"
Using the external loudspeaker, I announced, "If, if, they will surrender now..."
However, my wish was in vain, and before I had even finished advising them to surrender, flames erupted from the entire body of the enemy plane. And at the same time that I jumped down from the Wanzer, the last remaining enemy plane self-destructed and was blown to pieces.
"...I guess it's impossible to capture them alive after all. How troublesome..."
I looked at the remains of the enemy Wanzer, smoke billowing from the roof, and let out a heavy sigh.

MISSION 3:
Suspicion

"Made by Zaftra?"
As I widened my eyes, Hermes nodded with a difficult look on her face.
"Yeah. After all, this is the result of analyzing the chips that barely managed to survive the charred remains. I can't say it's 100% accurate from an objective standpoint, but my intuition tells me it's almost certain."
"So, the ones that attacked the German base were the Zaftra army?"
I asked bluntly, and Hermes responded with a shrug.
"As expected, I can't say that with any certainty. There are other armies besides the Zaftra army that use Zaftra-made Wanzers."
"That's true. In particular, the lightweight, small-sized work-purpose Wanzers made by Zaftra were sent in large numbers to countries around the world during the time the Constant Peacekeeping Organization was active, and are still in common use today. However, on the other hand, if it was a common model like that, it would also be on the EC's Wanzer list, so there's no way it could be an unidentified unit."
Zead groaned, half talking to himself, with a thoughtful look on his face.
"Moreover, the military forces using ZAFTRA-made Wanzers are mostly satellite countries of ZAFTRA or small countries receiving aid from ZAFTRA. It is too absurd for the military forces of such countries to invade the EC and destroy a German military base."
"So, does that mean the Zaftra army is the culprit after all?"
When I asked, Zead responded in a careful tone.
"It's also possible that it was a camouflage to make it look like that. Zaftra-made lightweight, small-sized Wanzers are not that hard to obtain. It would be easy to modify it appropriately to turn it into an unidentified unit."
"I'd really like to analyze one of the wreckages the German army has, the combat Wanzer that was the main force of the raiding force. I think we could figure out a lot of things by comparing it with the data from smaller aircraft."
Hermes pleaded, sounding quite reluctant.
"If the Germans want it, we can give them the remains of one of our small planes. Is there anything we can do?"
"After all, the other party is Blauer Nebel. I don't know what will happen, but I'll make an offer."
Saying that, Zead continued with a difficult look on his face.
"The bigger issue is where the enemy's main forces are and what they're doing. Common sense would suggest they're hiding out in Germany."

"Will the troops hiding out know that their retreat has been cut off?"
In response to my question, Zead nodded with a thoughtful look on his face.
"Yeah, they managed to escape by submarine. It's probably reasonable to assume that they got the message."
That's right. After we destroyed the three Wanzers, the submarine that had been jamming communications just above the surface of the sea just disappeared. Of course, as soon as communications were restored, Hermes notified the Danish military and the Kiel base, and a large-scale anti-submarine search was immediately launched from the sea and air, but so far I have not heard of any success.
"In any case, under the current circumstances, it should be virtually impossible for the enemy's main force to secretly escape from EC territory. However, if they try to force their way through, even if they manage to escape, it will be obvious where they came from. If I were the commander, what would I do? Maybe I should dispose of the conspicuous Wanzers and somehow get only my personnel to escape."
"Well, I think Zead would do that, but I get the feeling that this enemy doesn't value human life that much. If anything, now that they can't escape, they're probably going to go on a rampage once more and spectacularly self-destruct and take the easy way out."
Hermes said with a frown, and Zead responded with a bitter expression.
"That's true. It's quite troublesome, but the possibility is high. In that case, we'll need to predict where they plan to go on another rampage and come up with a plan to deal with it."
"...But what on earth were they trying to infiltrate into EC in the first place?"
Suddenly, realizing the root of the problem, I blurted out the answer aloud. Hermes responded with a puzzled look.
"What for? To destroy a German base, of course?"
"But destroying the German military base won't benefit anyone. If some country were to declare war on Germany and launch a large-scale invasion, it would make sense to send special forces ahead to launch a surprise attack on the defense base, but that's not what we're in right now, is it?"
After I pointed this out, both Hermes and Zead became more and more serious and thoughtful.
"That's certainly true, but the fact is, a German military base has been destroyed. If this isn't a prelude to a large-scale invasion, then it could be a terrorist attack with political motives, or a test launch of a new weapon like in the Sakata Industries incident. Those are the only motives I can think of, but both seem pretty far-fetched."

"That's true. If it was a terrorist attack, the only motive I can think of would be to damage Germany's prestige. I can't imagine any country or group wanting to damage the prestige of Germany or the EC, which were never that great to begin with, let alone the USN. On the other hand, if it was a test launch of a new weapon, then self-destruction would be out of the question. No matter how you look at it, this invasion force is moving with the assumption that they will be worn down."
Hermes said, shaking her head in annoyance.
"As expected, there is still not enough data! I can't make a single proper inference!"
"Well, even so, we should still consider it fortunate that we were able to come into direct contact with a part of the enemy. If we push ourselves any further, it will be difficult to achieve any new results."
Zead dazzled as he spoke, almost as if he was talking to himself.
"I think we should go to Paris and submit an interim report to the EC Council."
"Okay. If that's what you think, let's move to Paris."
Hermes nodded and headed towards the controls, but then suddenly realized something and said.
"I have gathered most of the data necessary to create the report. If you need more detailed data, just let me know and I'll provide it right away."
"Sorry."
Zead smiled and stood up, presumably to write up his report in another room. Then Hermes called out to me.
"Elsa, I think you should get some rest while you can. Once I get the transport to Paris, I'll be able to sleep without showing up at the EC Congress."
"Eh, but...."
When I hesitated, Zead, who was about to leave the cockpit, turned around and spoke.
"That's right. Whatever happens from now on, it's best to rest while you can. Please use Sleeping Room A."
"got it"
I don't feel that tired, but it's certainly a soldier's rule to take some rest whenever possible. I bowed and stood up, following Zead out of the cockpit. Before I knew it, I was in a Wanzer. I looked and saw a French Wanzer over there. However, the image on the monitor showed it as an enemy aircraft, and it was firing at my Wanzer. Ah, a mock battle, I thought, and easily avoided the attack of the French Wanzer. Perhaps because I was used to the quick reactions of the Durandal Wanzer, the enemy's movements felt like slow motion. I quickly closed the distance and fired my shotgun.

However, the shotgun I fired was not a training round, but a live round. Furthermore, the French Wanzer, hit by a shotgun round, suddenly erupted in flames from its entire body, and the next moment, it self-destructed and was blown to pieces.
"No way, that's impossible, why...?"
As I sat there, stunned and dazed, a cold, male voice - perhaps Glaser or Wagner - spoke in my ear, sounding condemning.
"You killed him."
"I-I didn't mean it like that..."
He tries to explain himself, but the words don't come out properly. Then the man's voice speaks coldly again.
"Elsa Eliane. You killed her. That is the only fact."
"It's not cleaning!"
"I didn't shoot a French Wanzer," I yelled. "I fought and destroyed an unidentified Wanzer that had attacked a German base. And I only destroyed the Wanzer, I didn't kill the pilot. The other side killed itself by blowing itself up."
"But you shot him. He's dead. It doesn't matter who you kill or how you kill him, you killed him."
"different!"
As I shouted, the man's voice spoke to me in a cold, yet persistent tone.
"What's the difference? What's the difference? You're a murderer. Am I wrong?"
"different!"
The moment I screamed at the top of my lungs, I woke up. It took me a moment to realise that I was in the Durandal transport plane's sleeping quarters.
"... What a bad dream."
I sighed and wiped the sweat from my forehead with my hand. However, even though it was a bad dream, I couldn't forget it. Today, for the first time in my life, I shot a live ammunition at a Wanzer with people inside, and as a result, at least two people lost their lives. This is an undeniable fact.
"A soldier's job is to kill the enemy. What are you doing now..."
Even though I was dazzled, my spirits did not improve. Come to think of it, it was rather ironic that as soon as I transferred from the regular military to a non-military organization, I ended up experiencing actual combat and killing the enemy. I looked at the clock and saw that there was still quite a bit of time until we were scheduled to arrive in Paris. However, not wanting to go back to sleep, I got up from the cot in the sleeping quarters. I washed my face in the sink, quickly fixed my face and hair, and left the sleeping quarters when Gide, who was drinking tea at a nearby table, spotted

me and called out to me.
"Did you get some rest?"
"Yeah, well."
Answering vaguely, I found an empty seat near Zead and sat down.
"Is the report ready yet?"
"Ah, that's already done. It's still just an interim report, and for the most part, we'll be able to connect the data that Hermes has prepared for us."
Saying that, Zead looked intently at my face.
"Hmm? You look gloomy. Did you have a bad dream?"
"Yeah, well."
I replied with a wry smile. Zead had been a member of the British Special Forces for many years, and had gained such harsh combat experience that he was nicknamed the Grim Reaper. From his perspective, I was no more than a fledgling bird, having just been in combat for the first time, having shot an enemy for the first time, and now suffering from nightmares. However, Zead suddenly spoke with a sincere tone, and I was dazzled.
"Firing a missile at a Wanzer with people inside is still unpleasant no matter how many times you do it. Well, when it stops being unpleasant, I think it's seriously dangerous."
"...Do you really feel that way?"
I asked timidly, and Zead nodded deeply.
"Yes. Missiles are far too powerful. Even if you try to capture the target without destroying it, you can't go easy on them. If you hit a small Wanzer, helicopter, or tank directly, it can kill the pilot without giving the pilot time to activate his escape mechanism."
Saying that, Zead added bitterly.
“But the Wanzers our enemy is using this time are equipped with self-destruct mechanisms and no escape mechanisms, making them pretty incredible things. It doesn’t really matter how the missile hits us.”
"Have you been flying missile-equipped aircraft for a long time?"
In response to my question, Zead shook his head.
"No, it wasn't that long ago that I started using missile-equipped machines. At the time, the wanzer manufacturers under contract with the British military didn't have any missile-equipped machines that could withstand airborne drops, which are essential for special forces. So I rode in a relatively light wanzer equipped with melee weapons and a shotgun. However, these often suffered casualties due to a lack of

firepower, so when missile-equipped machines capable of airborne drops appeared, I persistently persuaded my superiors to introduce them to the special forces. When I did, I was told to take responsibility for recommending their introduction, and I was forced to use a missile-equipped machine. After that, the unit's casualties visibly decreased, but even my own comrades began to openly call me the Grim Reaper. It's true that an attack that unilaterally fires powerful missiles from a long distance probably comes across as ruthless and unconditional, even to the allies being supported. Of course, I don't regret at all the fact that I proposed the introduction of missile-equipped machines, but it may not have been good for my mental health."
"Oh, is that so?"
Now that I was convinced, Zead told me with a serious expression.
"Elsa. I believe that your action of shooting the enemy Wanzer's legs to stop it from moving and urging it to surrender was the right thing to do, both as a soldier and as a human being. However, Durandal has even fewer members than a special forces unit. If we were to encounter the enemy's main force and find ourselves in a frontal battle, we would be forced into a battle at an overwhelming disadvantage. If that were to happen, I would not hesitate to fire my missiles. I want you to also act with your own survival in mind, above all else. Durandal is not a military force. There is no operational objective that takes priority over the lives of our members. Always remember that."
"yes"
I nodded deeply, realizing that in his eyes I was just a fledgling bird after all.
"Zead!"
As Zead and I entered the EC Council Secretariat office, a woman with dark chestnut hair and a suit called out to us.
"Cecil? Why are you here? Wasn't that the case?"
Zead asked in surprise, and the woman called Cecil replied in a clear tone.
"The German military base attack incident was starting to look a bit fishy. I came to Paris because I felt I would be caught off guard if I stayed in London. I also wanted to talk to you face-to-face, as you are the one investigating the incident."
"Really"
Jed nodded and looked at me.
"This is Cecil Allison, Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for the British Ministry of State, an old acquaintance of mine. This is Elsa Eliane, a new member of Durandal, and an excellent Wanzer pilot."
"Nice to meet you, Elsa."

Undersecretary Allison smiled and held out her hand. I was a little nervous, but I shook it. After all, the Eliane family had been remarkably untouched by people in professions such as politicians or high-ranking bureaucrats for generations.
"you're welcome"
Shaking hands, the Vice Minister's hands were unexpectedly large for a woman, and strong and powerful. Well, as an old friend of Zead's, there was no way she could be the kind of ignorant, big-headed bureaucrat whose only thought was profit-mongering politicians that his grandfather and father always criticized.
"So, what exactly is this suspicious development?"
As Zead asked, Deputy Minister Allison put her hand forward as if to restrain him.
"I can't tell you here. There is some information I don't really want people to hear. I've set aside a secret chat room, so let's talk there."
"Okay. Anyway, I'll submit my interim report."
With that, Zead headed to the office of the Diet Secretariat, and I hurriedly followed him. The procedure for submitting the report was very simple, and we entered the confidential meeting room with Deputy Secretary Allison.
"Well then, let's start by talking about the progress of our investigation."
After closing the door, which was made of a special material that blocked sound and radio waves, and switching on the anti-eavesdropping device, Zead sat down in a chair and began to speak. Deputy Secretary Allison listened to Zead's explanation in silence, but when he finished, his expression became serious and he glared at her.
"The Wanzers in Denmark were made by Zaftra. Of course, that alone doesn't mean we can say that it was the Zaftra army that attacked the German base."
"Of course that's true. Special forces who infiltrate other countries and carry out covert operations often go out of their way to avoid using domestically produced equipment."
When Zead responded, Deputy Secretary Allison asked, looking even more unconvinced.
"And that would be common sense to you, Brigadier General Glaser?"
"Yeah, he's also been in the special forces for a long time."
Jed said, furrowing his brows.
"What's the matter, Glaser?"
"Right around the time you discovered the suspicious Wanzer on the coast of Denmark, Brigadier General Glaser mobilized a unit from the Blauer Nebel to capture a base raiding force hiding out in Germany. However, judging from the size of the unit captured, it appears to have been one of several small groups hiding out in different

locations."
Deputy Secretary Allison's response made Zead look a little surprised.
"Oh, that's impressive. When we left the base, there was no sign of Blauer Nebel moving at all."
“Apparently it was a covert blitzkrieg operation that made full use of their mobility, something they are good at. Well, that’s fine.”
Deputy Director Allison said in a tone that clearly indicated she was displeased.
"The Wanzer group that was captured by the Blauer Nebel put up a fierce resistance, but all of them self-destructed and were reduced to wreckage. After analyzing the wreckage, the Blauer Nebel officially reported to the German Chancellor in the name of Brigadier General Glaser, head of the emergency investigation headquarters, that it was a new type of Wanzer manufactured by the USN, and that it was highly likely that a USN special forces unit had attacked the German base."
"What did you say?"
Zead's eyes widen in shock.
"Did that old fox Glaser issue such a simplistic and hasty report under his own name? Honestly, I find it hard to believe."
"But it's true."
Deputy Secretary Allison stated firmly.
"The current Chancellor of Germany is not originally a person with knowledge of military matters, but he completely accepted Brigadier General Glaser's report. He was raging at the summit, saying that not only Germany, but also the EC must protest to the USN. The British Prime Minister responded by saying that not only the USN military can use USN-made wanzers, and that they should respond more cautiously, and somehow managed to stop the protest in the EC's name."
"But there's nothing to stop Germany protesting on its own."
When Zead groaned, Deputy Minister Allison nodded approvingly.
"Exactly. Moreover, it seems as though the USN has been waiting for this, and is now howling that Germany's protest is an unforgivable insult to our pure and innocent country. This is really starting to become a headache."
"But an attack on the Iberia Megafloat or the European Union naval base in The Hague would make more sense. What advantage does the USN have in attacking a German inland base?"
Zead shook his head, looking confused.
"Well, if that's the case, even if the attackers weren't USN, I have no idea who would have destroyed a German base and why."

"That's right."
Deputy Secretary Allison nodded and seemed to hesitate for a moment, but then began to speak in a low voice.
"This is just between you and me, but there are several EC leaders who believe that this incident was staged by Germany."
"A self-inflicted act?"
Both Zead and I were stunned and looked at Undersecretary Allison.
"Five bases have been destroyed, and over a thousand people have been killed. Are you saying this incident was staged?"
"The only evidence that the base was really destroyed and that there were that many casualties is the Blauer Nebel investigation records. Even if you tried to investigate independently, you were essentially refused, weren't you? If the whole country wanted to fabricate something, it's not impossible."
When I asked her question, Deputy Minister Allison replied with a serious look on her face.
"The current German government does not have a high approval rating among the people. It is said that if the next election goes ahead as things stand, there is a high possibility of a change of government. And it is common knowledge among those involved in politics that one way for the current government to win an election is to forcibly create a crisis for the country and make the people believe that a national unity is necessary."
"I see"
Zead groaned with a complicated expression.
"It's true that it may be a fraud on the national level, and it's hard to deny that it isn't. But would the German military cooperate with such a fraud? Without the military's full cooperation, this fraud would never work."
"I won't say it's impossible that the entire German military would cooperate with the government and commit fraud, but it's not that likely. But if it's just Brigadier General Glaser and Blauer Nebel, it wouldn't be surprising if they cooperated with the current government and committed fraud."
With that, Deputy Minister Allison shook her head slightly.
"It may be strange for me to say this to you, Zead, but in any military, special forces involved in security-related tasks are treated as behind-the-scenes by the combat units, and even if they become commanders, they generally only reach the rank of colonel. There are very few cases of them progressing to the rank of general. But on the other hand, military personnel involved in security-related tasks can have

connections with politicians and bureaucrats. It seems that Glaser has had connections with the current German chancellor and other government officials for quite some time, and since they took power, his opportunities to appear in the public eye have increased dramatically. I think his promotion to brigadier general was probably due to his close relationship with the chancellor."
"So if there's a change of government, the Glazers will go back to being slavish?"
When Zead asked with a wry smile, Deputy Minister Allison nodded with a straight face.
"That's right. He probably won't be demoted to colonel, but on the contrary, he may be forced to retire since he has already achieved success and become a general. Of course, the commander of Blauer Nebel will probably be replaced by someone else, and depending on the circumstances, Blauer Nebel may be disbanded and reorganized."
"That would be even more unbearable for Glazer than being demoted."
The tone of his voice sounded somewhat sympathetic, and Zead glared at him. However, he quickly calmed down and continued speaking.
"However, if the Glaser and Blauer Nebel were the only German troops involved in the fraud, then the attack on the bases actually took place. Leaving aside the moral issues for now, the Blauer Nebel does not have the military strength to destroy five bases at once. Although they are an elite unit, they simply do not have enough numbers. Also, there is the existence of the Wanzers and the submarine that we encountered in Denmark. Even if the German government and the Glaser were colluding to commit some kind of fraud, I think there is a high possibility that another foreign military force was involved."
"But to return to the original point, there is no benefit to foreign troops in destroying German bases and inciting a crisis, right?"
In response to Deputy Secretary Allison's remark, Zead had a stern look on his face.
"Not really. If the destruction of the base is in Germany's interest, they could use that as a bargaining chip to attract foreign troops. For example, they could make a secret deal with the USN and deliberately issue a protest statement to stir up tensions. It's not impossible that the USN wants to start a war with the EC and is looking for a pretext to do so."
Two Continental Hawks
"Well, I think the USN hardliners are always looking to invade Madeira, given the right pretext."
Deputy Allison groaned, frowning.

"But Zead, even if they won the election, do you think the German government is crazy enough to start a war between the USN and the EC?"
“That’s something I’d rather ask, Cecil. If you ask me, the fact that this incident may have been staged is already enough to make me think that it’s a madcap story.”
Saying this, Zead turns both his palms up.
"Well, even so, a war that had claimed so many lives, not just among soldiers but among civilians as well, had in fact been waged for the purpose of testing new weapons, under an agreement between the warring parties that even included an arbitrator, about five years ago, in an incredibly crazy incident. No matter how crazy the intentions behind the attack on the German military base, it doesn't really surprise me."
"...that's true."
With a heavy sigh, Deputy Secretary Allison nodded.
"But even if it was just Germany that went mad, if a war broke out between the USN and Germany, all the EC countries would be drawn into it. We must do whatever it takes to prevent that from happening."
"That's true. However, no matter how much the EC side doesn't want to fight, if the USN attacks, war will inevitably break out."
Gide points out bitterly.
"Well, no matter how war-loving the USN military is, I don't think they'd be willing to take on the EC Navy head-on, given that they have a powerful military base on the seas called the Iberia Megafloat."
"Yes, I hope so."
As Deputy Secretary Allison glared at him as if praying, Zead spoke in a slightly different tone.
"In any case, the decision on how to respond to the USN• is entirely up to you, the people in charge of EC diplomacy. With no way out, it is our urgent task to predict what the German base attackers will do next, and where, and to come up with a countermeasure."
"That's true. If this incident was staged by Germany, then there's a chance that Blauer Nebel will be able to investigate the matter and bring it to a close. But if a foreign military is involved, it probably won't be that easy."
Nodding, Deputy Director Allison turned her gaze to Zead.
"What do you predict?"
"There isn't enough data to make a prediction. And you've just told me about a possibility I'd never even considered: that Germany staged the attack. I can't do

anything until I've had some time to reconsider it."
Saying that, Zead continued speaking with a thoughtful look on his face.
"However, I feel there won't be another attack on a military base like a German base. After this incident, military bases not only in Germany but all across the EC are on the highest level of alert. Deliberately attacking such a place would be an incredibly foolish plan. However, if whoever sent the unit to attack the German base intends to wear them out without any thought for their return or preservation, it's not impossible that they might dare to resort to such a foolish plan."
"I heard that the assault force's Wanzers have explosives pre-installed inside them so that if they fail, they won't be captured and will self-destruct along with their crew. Is that true?"
In response to Deputy Secretary Allison's question, Zead immediately nodded.
"That's right. When we fought the Wanzer in Denmark, it committed suicide rather than surrender after being stopped. We should think of this enemy as one against which our common sense doesn't apply."
"It seems so. To be honest, I had suspected that the attacking forces and the damage to the base were all fabrications by the German government and military, but it seems I was wrong. There is some kind of huge conspiracy going on within EC territory that can't be contained by such political tactics. If we get the countermeasures wrong, there will be even greater casualties. As I said before, I have a really bad feeling about this."
"Your premonitions are often right. Especially the bad ones."
Zead said in a very serious tone.
"So the State Department's doomsday prophet is alive and well?"
"Fortunately, the Prime Minister is willing to listen to Cassandra's premonitions of disaster, unless, of course, she can provide some evidence to back them up."
Deputy Secretary Allison also responded seriously, and Zead nodded deeply.
"I see. It's my and Durandal's job to show you the evidence."
"That's right. It would be much appreciated if you could give us a prediction as soon as possible. Of course, I'll make sure that genius boy provides us with all the necessary data."
At Deputy Director Allison's order, Zead's brows darkened slightly.
"I appreciate that you say that, but you know who Hermes is. I trust him, but with relations with the USN deteriorating, some will have their say."
"The official position of the EC Council is that, unless any new suspicious factors emerge, his credibility issue was settled the moment he was allowed to join Durandal.

If you, as the leader, trust him, then there's no problem. We'll just have to let those who want to say something say it."
Deputy Secretary Allison stated this in a firm tone. So I timidly asked him a question.
"Um, is there anything else that matters about Hermes' identity other than the fact that he's from the USN?"
"Well, it's a private matter. Besides, depending on the circumstances, just being from the USN could be enough of a problem."
As Zead growled unsteadily with a slightly troubled look on his face, Deputy Director Allison looked back and forth between him and me before speaking.
"May I tell you this much? His family name is Sturges."
"Sturges, by any chance, is that the USN Secretary of State?"
I asked with wide eyes, and Zead nodded gravely.
"He's my nephew."
"......Is that so"
I was surprised that a senior member of the EC Ground Tactical Research Institute was from the USN, but I never imagined he was the nephew of the Secretary of State. I was stunned. Then, Zead said with a complicated expression.
"As you may have heard, Hermes is critical of the USN's expansionist hegemony policy, and he came to the EC because he does not want to have any ties with the government or the military. Secretary of State Sturges is said to be the representative of the moderate faction within President Clift's current administration, but even so, Hermes is reluctant to mention that his uncle is a high-ranking USN government official, and he rarely uses the surname Sturges. You should keep that in mind as well."
"yes"
I nodded immediately. As long as Zead trusted and respected Hermes, I had no objections. However, no matter how hard Zead tried to protect her, if relations between the EC and the USN deteriorated to the point of direct conflict, Hermes' position would inevitably become precarious. At worst, she could be forcibly returned to the USN, or placed under surveillance by security authorities, or even placed under house arrest. Zead then tightened his expression and told Undersecretary Allison.
“Well then, we will be heading back to HQ for now. We need to use the equipment at HQ to perform a more detailed analysis of the remains of the Wanzer we obtained in Denmark. Then, we will predict what the assault force will do next and where as soon as possible, and send that information to you.”
"Thank you very much."

Deputy Secretary Allison nodded sincerely and stood up. He turned off the wiretapping prevention device, opened the heavy special door, and when we stepped into the hallway, a man was standing there.
"Thank you, Deputy Secretary Allison. And Lieutenant Colonel Elger."
The man, who looked to be in his mid-thirties and had an air of somewhere between boldness and boldness, had a strangely energetic air about him, and approached us with a grin on his face.
"That's perfect. Could you please comment on the attack on the German military base?"
"What's so good about that? You've been waiting in front of the secret lounge this whole time, haven't you?"
Deputy Director Allison looked at the man with a stern look.
"Of course, no comment. If you want to cover the incident, go to the joint press conference room."
"Well, as you know, I'm a freelancer. If I were doing the same things as the guys who get paid by a company, I'd dry up in no time."
The man makes a joking remark, but Deputy Director Allison doesn't pay him any more attention, turns around and walks away. Then, Zead stands in front of the man and tells him:
"Your press pass shouldn't get you this far, Lancaster. I don't know what tricks you've used, but if you don't leave quickly, I'll call security. If that happens, they'll confiscate your press pass and you won't be able to enter the EC Parliament Secretariat. Is that okay?"
"Hey, I've been running all over the Huffman battlefields, and there's no place I can't get in, and I can easily outwit the stupid guards without a pass."
The man called Lancaster boasts to Zead.
"Well, I was personally stopped by the ace of the British Special Forces, so even I can't be so reckless."
"I left the military a long time ago. You don't know that, do you?"
As Zead responded calmly, Lancaster scratched his head in a rather exaggerated manner.
"Oops, that's bad. I think Durandal was the leader of the EC Ground Tactics Research Institute. He's so used to being a soldier that he forgets things. So, as the leader of Durandal, what do you think about the attack on the German military base? You were ordered by the EC summit to investigate, right?"
"If you know that much, you can guess the answer, right? No comment other than the

official announcement from the EC Parliament Secretariat."
Saying this, Zead pointed his index finger at Lancaster's nose.
"I know for a fact that you're a talented journalist, but that's why we're all so wary of you. Many of us are terrified of what you're going to expose next, and there are even some idiots who are trying to tell us to shut you up quickly before you write an exposé. You'd better not do anything so rash."
"Hey, your sincere advice is much appreciated."
Lancaster replied with a grin. Then, finally realizing what I was saying, I asked Zead,
"Um, is this by any chance the famous Frederick Lancaster, the man who uncovered the conspiracy behind the Second Huffman Dispute?"
"Yes, yes, that's right!"
Lancaster happily responds to Zead's suggestion.
"Wow, this is amazing. Are you a fan of mine?"
"Yes, I found 'The Island of the Fatherlands' very interesting."
Saying that, I smiled.
"However, from the impression I got from that book, I thought the author would be a more serious and calm person. But surprisingly, he is, well, a bright and light-hearted person."
"Um, well, when I was writing that book, the circumstances were what they were. I had no choice but to become serious.... that's about it. See you later."
Apparently realizing that he had acted in a way that would destroy the image he had for readers, Lancaster looks a little embarrassed and quickly leaves the room. And as soon as he disappears down the hallway, Zead bursts out laughing.
"Well said, Elsa. I'm sure now he realizes that he is no longer in the position of one-sided observer of others, but is in the position of being observed as a celebrity."
Zead told me with a laugh, and I shrugged.
"To be honest, if that is really Frederick Lancaster, I'm a little disappointed. I can't respect a man who is so talkative and talks endlessly about meaningless things."
"Hahaha, that's harsh."
Laughing joyfully, Zead began to walk away slowly.
"That man has many friends and allies not only in his native OCU, but also in the USN, the EC, and even in ZAF, Asia, Africa, and the Arab world. His network is far superior to that of any mediocre intelligence agency. He is a man you cannot trust, but he is also known for being honest in return if you treat him with sincerity. He is not a simple man of justice, but he is not just an exposer either."
"His book said that he fought on Huffman Island as a member of the mercenary group

Canyon Crow, piloting a Wanzer. Is that true?"
I asked in a low voice as I walked alongside Zead. Zead nodded curtly.
"Yes, it's true. People have different opinions about his skills as a Wanzer pilot and whether he was useful as a member of the mercenary unit, but it's a fact that he experienced some pretty harsh combat. Even though he looks like that, he's not all talk. His mouth is clear and his arms and legs are also quite mobile."
With that said, Zead continued as if talking to himself.
"This incident is not something that can be solved by simply evaluating the Wanzer tactics. At worst, it seems like there may be a complex and bizarre political conspiracy on par with the Sakata Industries incident. However, if that is the case, in order to uncover the truth, we may need information beyond the reach of Durandal. If that happens, we may have no choice but to make a deal with Lancaster and use his information network."
"Do we really have to go that far?"
When I asked, Zead replied with a slight smile.
"Of course, there is the safe option of only carrying out the missions ordered by the EC Assembly and strictly adhering to the legal scope. However, as you know, Durandal is in a position where its survival is in danger unless it can achieve success and be recognized, even if it means going to great lengths. If the lives of its members are in direct danger, that's a different story, but otherwise, I'm willing to take fairly forceful measures."
Then, Zead's smile faded and he continued in a whisper.
"Plus, if things go in the worst case scenario and the EC and USN go to war, we could lose the Hermes. We can't just sit back and watch that happen. We have to stop it, no matter what it takes."
"I got it"
I replied in a whisper.

MISSION 4:
Poland's new resource area

"After all, there's simply not enough data to make any reasonable predictions. The fact that the German government and military may be in contact with the raiding force is a disturbing factor."
Looking at the display on the monitor, Hermes sighed.
"Moreover, if the raiding forces are prepared to be annihilated within EC territory without caring about losses or casualties, then it can only be said that they can attack any fortress or important base they like. That makes it impossible to predict."
"I understand what you want to say, but you need to narrow it down somehow, otherwise you won't be able to do your job."
Zead responded with a wry smile.
"I know this is a drastic method, but let's start by eliminating purely military bases. Those places are able to defend themselves without us having to predict and warn them."
"But if the raiding force is in fact a USN special forces unit, there's a good chance that their next target will be the EC naval base in The Hague. I don't think they'd be able to attack the Iberia Megafloat, though."
Hermes said it without hesitation, but now that I knew his identity I was a little taken aback. Zead, however, responded with a completely calm demeanor.
"No, that's not the case. If they were to attack The Hague base by land, the Dutch army base in Utrecht would be a major obstacle. As long as they've left that base alone and are attacking bases in Germany, I think it's safe to say that the chances of The Hague base being attacked are low."
"Hmm, I guess so."
The problem is whether the raiding force is able to decide their targets as calmly and logically as Zead, Hermes groaned.
"Well, never mind. For now, I'll exclude purely military bases, but even so, I can't say I've narrowed it down very much. The capital Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Frankfurt, Hanover, Cologne, Bremen, Dusseldorf, Dresden, and almost all of Germany's major cities are potential targets for attack."
"Hmm."
This time it was Zead who groaned and peered at the monitor Hermes was operating.
"Is Germany almost defenseless?"
"That's true. Five army bases have been destroyed, and the air force base, naval base, and remaining army bases have their hands full just defending themselves. If a city were to be attacked, they would mobilize quickly, but they would undoubtedly be slow to react, and in the meantime they would be able to do whatever they wanted.

Berlin is the only city with a capital defense force, so it might be able to defend itself to some extent, though."
With that, Hermes shrugged.
"If I were leading an assault force, I would quickly invade a city, no, a small town, any place with weak defenses, take civilians hostage, and then try to escape from EC territory. Well, if it were monsters like Glaser or Wagner, they might crush them along with the hostages, but surely the politicians and the media wouldn't keep quiet, right?"
"Well, we'll see. In that case, the question is how the German government will respond, but if the German government is in contact with the raiding force, it's hard to predict."
Zead tilted his head with a confused look on his face.
"You're right, we don't have enough data. If Arrow 3 were here, we might be able to get more specific information about the situation of the German army."
"Even so, there's nothing we can do if they're not here. We just heard that they're stuck in Iceland because of this whole incident, and won't be able to come back for another two or three days."
Hermes replied with a slightly dissatisfied look on her face. So I asked Zead,
"Arrow 3, you're the one on the road, right? Are you familiar with the German military?"
"Yeah, Aro-13 was in the German army before coming to Durandal. He's well-informed and has great intelligence analysis skills, so he would definitely be useful if he were here, but there's nothing we can do about it now that he's gone."
When Zead responded, Hermes sandwiched him from the side.
"It was a bit of a problem that the destination of the business trip was Iceland, which is nearby but outside the EC territory. When things get like this, it's a hassle to call him back, and even if I contact him to ask for advice, I'm sure the contents of my communications will be checked. Or should I wait for him to come back?"
"No, we can't afford that. This is not an exaggeration. We need to make a prediction as quickly as possible, even if it's just a second, otherwise the risk of it being too late is too high."
Though he stated it firmly, Zead continued in a bitter tone.
"But I don't have any clues to narrow it down. Hermes is right, a raiding party could do whatever they wanted, anywhere in Germany."
"If that's the case, why don't you do something about it?"
At that moment, something suddenly flashed in my mind, and I began speaking

quickly.
"After wiping out five army bases, the raiding forces dispersed to hide out within Germany. That was fine, but their retreat base on the Danish coast was captured, and one of the dispersed forces was captured by Blauer Nebel. Normally, they would make their next move at this point, right? If they had hesitated, their hiding places would have been exposed one after the other, and they would have been defeated one by one."
"That's right."
Zead nodded and I continued speaking.
"But in reality, the hidden assault force has not yet made a move. That being said, it doesn't seem like Blauer Nebel has pursued and captured the hidden force, or cornered them so severely that they have no time to move. This makes me think that there might be some kind of secret connection between the assault force and Blauer Nebel."
"Yeah, I think that's quite a possibility."
Hermes replied in a tone that suggested there was no need to ask now, but I continued speaking rather forcefully to stop him from interrupting.
“And if, as Undersecretary Allison suspects, the German government is using the assault forces as a strategy for the election, and Blauer Nebel is also connected to that line, then surely there won’t be any more serious fighting within Germany. In particular, if it ends up resulting in casualties among ordinary citizens, that would be the worst case scenario for the current administration, so I think they will avoid that at all costs.”
"...Wait a minute, Elsa."
Hermes stopped me with a confused voice.
"So, does that mean that the raiding forces that mercilessly wiped out five army bases will be considerate of the German government with an upcoming election and not lay hands on civilians?"
"If the German government and the raiding force are secretly connected and pursuing each other's interests, I think that's entirely possible. Moreover, in that case, Blauer Nebel, who is in charge of the search, is also a conspirator, so even if their escape route is cut off, the raiding force can remain safely hidden within Germany, right? There's absolutely no need to rush and take civilians hostage."
When I pointed this out, Hermes sighed and held his forehead.
"That may be true, but... that would be too disrespectful to the army soldiers who were killed."

"Of course. It's a given that people who become victims of political intrigues will never find happiness in the future."
Growling in a bitter tone, Zead looked at me and asked.
"Elsa, your reasoning is persuasive, but there are other possibilities. For example, is it possible that the German government and Blauer Nebel are innocent, and that the cornered raiding force prioritized the preservation of its personnel over a desperate counterattack, and secretly abandoned the Wanzer somewhere, and that only the personnel were planning to sneak out of EC territory?"
"I think it's a possibility. However, even if we discard the Wanzer, it doesn't mean we'll be able to escape from the EC area for sure. If we're caught midway through our escape, we'll end up being captured without even being able to engage in combat, let alone self-destruct."
I said, shaking my head.
"Of course, even if they can't commit suicide in a spectacular way, they could still commit suicide by using classic methods like putting poison in their teeth, cutting their own blade, or biting their tongue. However, if they committed suicide along with their Wanzer, the pilot's remains would be charred to the point that it would be impossible to identify them, let alone their race or gender. However, if they simply committed suicide and left their bodies behind, they could end up giving away more information to the enemy than if they had captured them alive. On the other hand, if each person carried a large amount of explosives that would char them and cause a self-destruct, it would be heavy, conspicuous, and dangerous in many ways, and there would be almost no benefit to throwing away the Wanzers. Considering these risks, if the assault force felt cornered, I think they would choose to force their escape by taking hostages or some other means, rather than abandoning their main Wanzer."
"I see. If they were so adamant about destroying the evidence by self-destructing at the last minute, then they certainly wouldn't throw away the Wanzer equipped with a self-destruct device."
Zead nodded with an understanding look.
"Okay. I won't say it too loudly, but Durandal's basic understanding is that there is a high possibility that the German government and Blauer Nebel are in cahoots with the assault force. So, if that's the case, what will the assault force do next?"
"If we're optimistic, we might do nothing and wait for an opportunity to escape. But if their goal is to provoke Germany and increase tensions between the EC and the USN, they could attack important EC bases outside Germany."

As soon as I answered, Hermes asked again.
"So the target of the attack is probably The Hague base?"
"No, I don't think that's likely."
With that said, I shook my head again.
"If they were planning to invade Holland from Germany and attack The Hague base, they would likely eliminate the Dutch military base in Utrecht first, even if it meant omitting one or two German army bases from the attack."
"Oh, that's right. I forgot about that."
With a wry smile, Hermes began to retrieve the data.
"Well, rather than thinking about it too much, it'll be quicker to let the computer search for data that matches the criteria. The candidate site is outside of Germany. There are no military bases between the German border and the candidate site, and it's also an important base that could directly strike a blow if the EC goes to war with the USN."
"Is there a place that conveniently meets those conditions?"
When Zead asked, Hermes replied while operating the key.
"If I can't find a suitable spot, I'll try changing the conditions. But for now, this... Ah, there it is!"
"Poland's new resource area."
When I saw the relevant data displayed on the monitor, I glared at him a little.
"It's true that it's not as directly opposed to the USN as The Hague Base or the Iberia Megafloat, but if it were to be destroyed, it would be a major blow to the entire EC."
"Yes, at the very least, they won't be able to fight a long-term war on their own. Several of the rare metals essential to Wanzer production can in fact only be mined in the new resource areas of Poland within the EC. Of course, there are probably some reserves, but the psychological pressure of not being able to replenish them is huge, I think."
Saying this, Hermes looked at Zead.
"I think this is probably settled. Please convey this to Deputy Secretary Allison, along with Elsa's reasoning."
"That's true. It's a conjecture that assumes a betrayal of the German government and Blauer Nebel, so we can't make it public carelessly."
Zead nodded with a difficult look on his face.
"I will contact Deputy Secretary Allison with that information as soon as possible."
"It seems like things are going in the wrong direction."
The day after I submitted my prediction that Poland's new resource areas would be

attacked to Undersecretary Allison, I arrived at the central control room at the usual time. Zead, who had already arrived, suddenly spoke to me in a serious tone.
"I just heard from Undersecretary Allison that the German Chancellor officially announced in a video conference with the leaders of the EC countries what he said were intelligence obtained through the Blauer Nebel investigation. According to that, the enemy, believed to be USN special forces that attacked the German military base, is planning to attack coastal military facilities in order to re-secure a withdrawal route by sea and to strike a blow to the EC's maritime forces. Based on this information, the German military will place emphasis on the defense of its bases in Kiel and Rostock, but the German Chancellor apparently said that he also wants The Hague base in the Netherlands and the Gdansk base in Poland to be on full alert."
"That could be... decoy information."
I groaned, and Zead responded with a grim expression.
"That's true. It's true that with no way to retreat, it's possible that the raiding force might attack the coastal base in search of an opening, but if that's the case, they should have acted sooner. Attacking the heavily defended naval base at this stage would make it impossible to annihilate them, let alone break through them. However, if they were planning to direct the Polish army's attention to the Gdansk base and the coast and attack new resource areas, this information would be a terrifying trap."
"So how did Deputy Secretary Allison respond?"
I asked, and Zead shook his head.
"The current situation seems to be that they are at a loss as to how to respond. The current Polish government is basically adopting a policy of cooperation with Germany, so unless there is extremely irrefutable evidence, it is impossible to say that the German government may be colluding with the attacking forces. Therefore, it seems that from the beginning, they had intended to whisper to Polish EC members that they had received unconfirmed information that the new resource area was being targeted, without giving detailed evidence. However, Germany went first and made an official statement from the Prime Minister that the Gdansk base needed to be on guard. So it is doubtful whether anyone would even listen to a whisper that the new resource area was in danger."
"But that doesn't mean we can just sit back and watch, right?"
My voice involuntarily trembling, I asked in a pleading tone to Zead, to which he replied in a heavy tone.
"That's true, but the question is, where can we go and what can we do? For the time being, the order we received from the EC Parliament to investigate the attack on the

German base is still valid, so we can use that as a pretext to go to the new resource-rich areas in Poland. However, even if we go there, if we don't get cooperation from the Polish military there, then in reality we won't be able to do anything on our own. If we're not careful, it could turn into a repeat of the time when Wagner treated us like a nuisance at the German military base."
Saying that, Zead looked at the monitor, which was showing a map of the new resource zone in Poland.
"For now, I've asked Deputy Secretary Allison to try to send a direct warning to the commander of the Polish military who is actually guarding the new resource zone. Regardless of the intentions of the Polish government and the military brass, if a decent soldier is informed that there may be an enemy attack on the area he is guarding, he will try to take countermeasures. However, neither Deputy Secretary Allison nor I have personally met the commander of the new resource zone's security, and we have almost no personal information on him, so even if we were able to speak to him directly, I don't know what the outcome would be. At the very least, it should be quicker than going through politicians or bureaucrats who don't have much knowledge about military affairs."
Then Jed turned his gaze towards me.
"However, we cannot just wait around doing nothing until we hear from Deputy Secretary Allison. Assuming that the Polish military will heed our advice and tactical guidance, we need to come up with a concrete plan for how we will defend the resource extraction facilities if a German military base raiding force attacks the new Polish resource area. I'd like you to examine the data and come up with a plan of operations."
"Yes, I understand"
I nodded and sat in front of an empty monitor. Normally, planning these kinds of operations was the job of officers, especially high-ranking officers in staff positions, and as a NCO it was something that I had almost no experience with. However, when actually operating a Wanzer, anyone who is willing to use their brains, even NCOs and regular soldiers, would naturally think about what kind of enemy they were facing and how they should attack to win. If an officer ordered them to do so and they simply followed the orders without thinking, their skills as a Wanzer pilot would not improve.
"The assault forces used a large number of rockets and missiles, quickly rendering the German base powerless to resist. In other words, if they were to get close enough to the mining facility that the rockets could reach, they would have essentially lost."

In order to deal with the Wanzers, who are equipped with rockets and missiles, you have no choice but to close the distance and engage in close combat. Therefore, even if you are defending a facility, you need to be proactive. To do this, you need to quickly and accurately determine the enemy's location. This may seem like a no-brainer, but if you don't know where the enemy is, there is no way to approach them.
"Normally, the location of a Wanzer unit can be detected by radar. If they were capable of dealing with the enemy that way, there's no way the German military base would have been so devastated. The basic approach to quickly discovering a unit with excellent concealment is to gather a number of patrol planes and Wanzers and have them disperse and search... but I doubt they have the manpower to do that."
I glared at the data I had called up, dazed.
"Let's reverse the roles of offense and defense and think about what would be most troubling for us if we were to be defended. If we're on the offensive, we can't do anything unless we get close to the mining facility, so the most troubling thing would be for them to set up a patrol line all around it. In that case, we'll set up a patrol line on the outer edge, and if an assault force gets caught, we'll have the defense force rush in as quickly as possible and strike them in close combat. It's a mundane plan, but in the end, I think this is the only option."
The problem was how to set up the patrol line, but it might be quicker to consult Hermes about the technical details, I thought, tilting my head. Suddenly, Hermes herself appeared in the central control room, rambling on about something to Zead. It seemed that I had been concentrating on planning the operation and hadn't heard what she was saying until now.
"Just one more person makes a big difference. And Latona has plenty of combat experience. If she links up with Elsa, depending on how they fight, the two of them could become a fighting force equal to that of a platoon."
"But we're not going to fight."
Zead responded in a tone that sounded a bit overwhelmed.
"Fighting the raiding forces is the job of the Polish military, who are guarding the new resource area. All we can do is inform them, warn them, and, if requested, teach them effective tactics. As you always say, Durandal is not an army."
"I understand that very well, but there may be times when we have no choice but to fight, right? Like in Denmark."
Hermes continued, sounding strangely plausible.
"It's better to be safe than sorry. It would be best if we didn't have to fight, but there's

no harm in preparing our fighting forces, right?"
"That's true, but Latona, are you sure it's okay for you to leave the duties you're supposed to be in charge of?"
Zead's words made me think, and I twisted my body and turned around. I saw not only Hermes, but also Latona, standing against the wall of the central control room with her arms crossed, exuding an aura that made her seem indestructible even with a lever. It seemed like she was serious about joining us. Then she turned to Zead and said decisively.
"I've finished all the work I needed to do. I still have some final explanations to give to the client, but I think it's fine to leave that to Arrow 4. In fact, things might go more smoothly without me."
Staring intently at Zead, Latona continues speaking brusquely.
"I heard there was a battle in Denmark. I know the leader is a veteran and a strong man, and I know that Arrow 6 is excellent, but even so, I can be of some use if I'm there. At the very least, I think a mission that suits me better is dealing with dangerous people who don't mind killing people and then blowing themselves up, rather than trying to curry favor with the bigwigs of a weapons company."
"Well, I understand your feelings, but it hasn't been decided yet that we're going to Poland."
Zead responded soothingly, but the moment he did so, his portable communicator started to ring.
"rude"
Zead politely declined and took out his portable communicator. Then, after whispering a few words, he quickly put the communicator away and looked around at us with a serious expression.
"It's Deputy Secretary Allison. He's been in direct contact with the Polish security commander for the new resource zone. According to the Deputy Secretary, the commander has taken the warning seriously and will be strengthening security immediately. He also requested that we receive Tejulandar's advice."
"Well then, let's go to Poland right away! That's it!"
Hermes yelled cheerfully, but Zead looked at me and asked.
"Elsa, have you come up with a defense plan?"
"Yes, the general idea."
As soon as I responded, Zead, Hermes, and even Latona gathered in front of the monitor where I was reviewing the plan. And before I could explain, Zead looked at the monitor and nodded.

“I guess we should set up a patrol line and defend the perimeter. The only way to counter the Wanzers’ long-distance attacks is to get in as quickly as possible and attack them.”
"But the problem is how to set up the patrol line. The Polish military probably doesn't have many troops available for patrols."
When I said that, Hermes responded with glee.
"In that case, we can just scatter heat sensors. They won't be useful in urban areas or places with a lot of car traffic because the signals will be disturbed, but the outer edge of Poland's new resource zone is mostly Rocky Mountains and wilderness, except for where the industrial roads run. If a Wanzer passes over them, we'll be able to catch them without a doubt."
"But Poland's new resource area is quite large, isn't it? If we were to scatter sensors all around the periphery, we would need a significant number of them. Even if we were to purchase ready-made products from a manufacturer, wouldn't that take too much time, money, and effort?"
Latona pointed out sharply, but Hermes just grinned and shook her head.
"And now, there's a huge amount of heat source sensors in the warehouse at Durandal HQ. We just happened to be contracted by a certain manufacturer to develop a new type of sensor for the Wanzers, and when we asked them to send over their old-style heat source sensors as reference material, for some reason, they sent over so many that the warehouse was full. I think they probably had a surplus of them and didn't know where to put them. If we can make good use of them, then everything will be OK."
"...how convenient."
Latona groaned in exasperation, while Hermes simply shrugged.
"Well, if anything, I knew I had some spare heat sensors on hand, so I thought I could use them to set up a patrol line. If I didn't have the sensors, I'm sure I would have thought of some other way."
"Either way, if it solves the problem, that's good."
Zead declared with a serious face.
"Immediately, take the sensors out of the warehouse and load them onto the transport plane. We'll be dispatched to Poland as soon as they're ready."
"OK. And now, I'd like to explain the link system to Elsa. Is that okay?"
Hermes asked, and Zead frowned slightly.
"If you think it's necessary, that's fine, but do it quickly. It would be no laughing matter if you took too long to prepare, then got to Poland only to find that they had

already attacked."
"In that case, I'll explain the link. Hermes will have to arrange for the sensors to be loaded, right?"
Latona suggested, and Hermes nodded in agreement.
"Well, I'll be counting on you. That's right, if we're going to load a warehouse full of sensors, we'll need a large transport plane, and in that case, I won't be able to pilot it alone. I'll have to make arrangements with the pilot as well. I wonder whose free right now."
Muttering to herself, Hermes left the central control room. Meanwhile, Zead used the central control room's communications system to make a direct call to the Polish New Resource Zone Security Commander. It would be a hassle since they were dealing with a military facility, but since Deputy Minister Allison had spoken first, it should be quick once they got through. Then Latona began to explain the link system to me.
"The Link System is a system that links Wanzer computers together and allows them to automatically coordinate battles. Apparently the USN, OCU, and Zaftra are also researching it, but Durandal's Link System is Hermes's creation, and he himself says it's, without exaggeration, the best in the world. However, I don't know much about the technical details of programming and calculation speed, and I don't think you need to either. So, what happens specifically when the computers are linked is that when my Wanzer attacks the enemy, if your Wanzer is within range, the attack will automatically be synchronized. Usually, even in coordinated attacks, there is a slight difference in timing, but linked attacks are completely simultaneous, so even a Wanzer equipped with a shield will be unable to block either one's attack."
"That's certainly an amazing technique."
When I expressed my admiration, Latona waved her hand lightly and continued speaking.
"No, according to Hermes, the effect of linked attacks doesn't end there. Automatic attacks are initiated regardless of manual attack operations, so if you and I attack the same target, we will each attack twice, once manually and once automatically. Of course, if we use a gun, the ammunition consumption will double, and if we use a melee weapon, we'll be forced to make rather unreasonable movements, but still, doubling the number of attacks is an incredible effect."
"...I guess so."
I was silently dazzled by how incredible this would be for an opponent. Being caught in a pincer attack from two directions was difficult enough, but if the attacks were

perfectly synchronized and burst out twice in a row for a total of four times, most Wanzers would be defeated without a second thought.
"Hermes says that in the future, he wants to link all of the computers in the Wanzers that make up our team and even synchronize their missile attacks, but for now, he wants to just link my Wanzer with yours and get some operational data."
As I said that, Latona's expression tightened as she stared at me.
"So, this is a word of advice from me, not Hermes. The Zenith you are using is certainly an excellent unit that is easy to handle and fast, but its armor is too thin and its joints are too fragile. In real combat, even if it was a lucky hit, it would likely stop working. Also, if you're up against a villain that mercilessly shoots at pilots who escape, once the Wanzer stops working, you're sure to be killed in battle. It won't be as fast, but you should at least switch to a Quint."
"Uh huh..."
I appreciate the advice, but I tilt my head in confusion: Quint? The Wanzer is made by Iguchi, an OCU-affiliated company, and I'd test-ridden it once while in the French military, but compared to the Zenith I was used to, it felt a lot sluggish. Of course, if it was a Durandal model, it would have been adjusted to be much nimbler and agile, but I still felt like it just wasn't suited to me.
"You on Quint?"
"No, I'm driving a Stoke Mark IV."
Surprisingly, Latona named the Wanzer, manufactured by the USN-affiliated company Freimann.
"In terms of agility, they're among the best in the world. Also, although not as good as Quint, they are armored compared to Zenith, and their joints are quite sturdy. However, the structure of their arms was designed for combat from the start, so their accuracy when wielding a gun is quite low. For that reason, I can't recommend them to you."
When she said that, Latona tilted her head slightly.
"No, but if the problem is only with the arms, we could replace them with parts with higher accuracy and turn it into a hybrid. I'll check with Hermes later if that's possible."
"But if you mix different species together, wouldn't the balance be poor and the performance drop?
Or will it be okay if it's made with Durandal?"
Feeling suspicious, I asked Latona. It's true that each part of a Wanzer is basically interchangeable, regardless of the company's product, but it's common knowledge

among Wanzer pilots and mechanics that if you swap out the arms and legs of a different type of Wanzer, it will usually lose its balance, and in the worst case scenario, it will break down so frequently that it will no longer be usable. So, although it is sometimes done as a stopgap measure when there is a shortage of parts on-site, it is rare for a pilot to pilot a hybrid Wanzer from the start. However, Latona responded nonchalantly.
"That doesn't mean that everything will be safe, but if you get Hermes to adjust it, a hybrid can be used in almost the same way as a normal product. Still, for someone with average skill, I think a Quint is safer than a Stoke hybrid, but since you're adept at piloting a Zenith, a Stoke might be more to your liking."
"Maybe so"
I nodded and gave a small shrug.
"But in any case, if you change planes, you need to do some practice driving. Do you have the time?"
"No. But even if we keep it as Zenith, we still need training to get them used to the link system. The next best thing would be to have them learn it using a simulator on the transport plane to Poland."
Saying this, Latona frowned slightly and scratched her head.
"Durandal's simulator is a special one that Hermes set up, and it allows you to operate it with a feeling that is quite close to that of a real battle. Even so, it's not exactly the same as a real battle, but well, it's far better than nothing. Of course, I'll join in, so you'll have to learn the tricks of link attacks as quickly as possible."
"yes"
Please, be gentle, I added silently.
"Alright then, timeout. You two did a great job."
Hermes' cheerful voice came from the headset, and I sighed. When I was in the French army, I had been forced to do combat training using simulators several times, but perhaps the machine's functions were low or the program was poorly written, but it was nothing more than a Wanzer action game at an amusement park, and I didn't think it would be useful for training at all. However, Durandal's simulator was on a completely different level. First of all, the cockpit of the actual aircraft used in battle is used as the simulator, which gives it an incredible sense of realism. The simulation operation is exactly the same as when piloting a real aircraft, and even the vibrations and noise are reproduced almost exactly. To put it in a metaphor, if an ordinary simulator feels like a game or a movie, Durandal's simulator is like having an extremely realistic dream. The only thing they have in common is that it's not real, but

the impact they give you is fundamentally different. Also, the virtual Wanzers set as enemies in the simulator are so cunning, merciless, and effective that they make you a little angry. According to Latona, the battle pattern of this virtual Wanzer was programmed by Hermes, and although there are fully automatic unmanned Wanzers that run on the same program, she said that this one is no joke and is stronger than Wanzers piloted by average pilots. In fact, I have no confidence that I would survive an attack from two or more virtual Wanzers at the same time, let alone one-on-one. However, Latona and my Wanzer, linked by a link system, were able to take on not just two, but up to eight virtual Wanzers at once and successfully annihilate them all. This was certainly because the link system was effective, but I thought it was more because Latona was incredibly skilled as a Wanzer Hero, or rather as a warrior.
Latona's fighting method was very simple. She would quickly dive into the enemy's arms and slam the pile bunker attached to the Wanzer's left arm to break through the armor. One wrong move would put her in danger of being hit with gunfire from close range, but her skill and the agility of her stalk prevented the enemy from taking aim. Even the supposedly unfazed virtual Wanzers couldn't aim properly, so it would be even more so for a human pilot. Moreover, no matter what type of aircraft the enemy was, Latona always aimed accurately at the computer core and slammed her pile bunker into it. If it was a direct hit, it would be rendered inoperable in one hit, and even if it was slightly off, if it could damage the wiring near the computer core, it would undoubtedly cause serious damage. In fact, even if I attacked alone, the virtual Wanzers would easily dodge, but after being hit by her attacks, they were almost unable to avoid them, and were hit directly by gunfire and destroyed.
“In the end, in order to utilize the link system, I have to keep up with her speed. That’s essentially all that matters.”
Without saying a word, I was dazzled. In fact, during the first few simulator battles, I was unable to keep up with the Latona's speed, and my Wanzer ended up farther away than firing distance, missing the opportunity for a linked attack. If I made such a foolish mistake in a real battle, I would not only be putting myself in danger, but also Latona. Fortunately, the hybrid Wanzer I was to pilot, which consisted of a Stoke's torso and legs connected to Quint's arms, was functioning very well, although with the help of a power turbocharger pack, so I wouldn't be left behind due to the difference in the unit's performance. Now, the only thing that mattered was my skill.
"I've managed to keep up in the simulator, but whether I can do well in a real race is something I'll just have to try my best to do."
Feeling dizzy, I got out of the Wanzer's cockpit and removed the headset. I looked

over and saw that Latona had already gotten out of the Wanzer and was talking to Hermes about something, but when she noticed me, she immediately called out to me.
"Hello, Elsa. What were your impressions of piloting a hybrid Wanzer?"
"Excellent. Hard to believe it's a hybrid."
When I responded, Hermes' expression showed obvious relief.
"I see, that's good to hear. I haven't really done much with hybrids that have interchangeable arms before, so I was wondering how it would feel to actually use them."
"Oh really? Well then, what kind of hybrids have you made so far?"
When I asked out of curiosity, Hermes replied as if it was the most obvious thing to say.
"That's right, I changed the legs of the missile-equipped machine used by Zead. All of the ready-made support-type Wanzers are slow. When a situation is anticipated where it will have to move quickly over a wide area, like this time, the legs are changed beforehand. However, if you attach fast-moving legs to a heavy missile-equipped machine, the balance is inevitably poor. The Heterogeneous Hybrid that I tuned was only at a level that Zead was able to pilot, but if it were a normal Wanzer pilot, it would most likely fall over the moment he took a step forward."
"The leader's skills are truly incredible, being able to pilot such an aircraft and even perform fighter maneuvers and airborne drops."
Latona dazzled with her heartfelt tone. Then, an announcement came from Captain Robert, the private pilot of the large transport plane.
"We will soon arrive at the Polish New Resource Zone Airport. We will be landing shortly, so everyone please fasten your seat belts."
"Oops, that's bad. We took the trouble to collect data using the simulator, but if we don't adjust the Wanzer accordingly, it's pointless."
Hermes hurriedly went to the operator's seat for the Wanzer control computer and fastened her seat belt.
"I have to work here, so could you please tell Zead that I should take care of the meeting with the Polish army?"
"Oh, I see."
Latona nodded and urged me on.
"Let's go, Elsa."
"yes"
I followed Latona almost feeling like a recruit following the orders of a veteran soldier.

But with her as my companion, this feeling wasn't so bad.
"Nice to meet you. I'm Remel, in charge of security at the new resource zone's central base. I'm really grateful to everyone from Durandal for coming."
The Polish officer who greeted us shook hands with Zead and greeted him in fluent English. He was probably in his thirties. It would be misleading to describe him as a gentle man who didn't look like a soldier, but he had a calm and composed air about him. When Zead returned the greeting, Remel spoke in a tone that sounded a little apologetic.
"There are four bases in this new resource zone; North, East, South, and Central. We were warned that the forces that had destroyed the German base could attack at any time, so unfortunately, the people in charge of the other three bases have decided to stay at their posts and speak to you all via TV line."
"Yes, I think it's a very thoughtful consideration."
Zead responded calmly as well.
"Well then, let's open the line and hear about the security situation at each base."
"yes"
When Remel nodded, the operator opened the TV line, and three men appeared on the monitor. The screen was not very large, so it was difficult to see the details of their appearances, but they all had a stern military look, and looked older than Remel. They introduced themselves as managers of their respective bases, and explained the security situation in a stern tone. It seemed more like they were reporting to Remel, rather than explaining things to us. Just as I was thinking this, one of the managers said the following at the end of his explanation.
"That is the situation here, Lieutenant Colonel."
"What? Lieutenant Colonel?"
I was careful not to say it out loud, but I found myself staring at Remel's calm appearance. As someone in charge of the security of such a large and important facility, I had thought he might be a captain or even a lieutenant, so to be honest, I was surprised.
Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Remel gave a brief explanation to the three officers about the security situation at the central base and the entire new resource zone.
"Normally, when the new resource area is on high alert like it is now, patrol aircraft and other support would come from the air force base, but this time the air force is focusing all its efforts on patrolling the coastal areas, so there is no support here. Therefore, as each person in charge reported earlier, in addition to radar surveillance, we are sending out Wanzer patrol units from each base to patrol."

"Understood. Considering your current fighting forces, I think this is the best solution."
Zead commented in a matter-of-fact tone.
"In order to effectively defend this vast new resource area, early detection of an attacking force is of utmost importance. For the time being, we will be conducting aerial patrols by aircraft, but in addition to that, we have a plan to spread sensors and set up a patrol line. If you would allow us, we would like to try it out."
"Sensors? Where do you put them?"
Lieutenant Colonel Remel asked in a confused manner, to which Zead replied simply.
"The planner will explain this operation, Elsa."
"Y-Yes."
Having been suddenly nominated, I responded somewhat flustered, but Zead gave me instructions as if it was the most natural thing in the world.
"Please explain your plan to the Polish military."
"yes"
I couldn't help thinking, "Are they really going to do this without any warning?", but I couldn't make a fool of myself in front of the Polish soldiers. So, in as calm a tone as possible, I explained our plan to scatter thermal sensors and set up a patrol line.
"I see, that's great."
When I finished my explanation, to my delight, Lieutenant Colonel Remel was the first to speak up in praise.
"If a missile or rocket is used at a long distance, by the time the patrol detects the enemy, there is a high risk that they will have approached so close that it will be too late. If we can catch and intercept the enemy on the periphery, we can minimize the damage to the facility."
"Yes, but we still don't know for sure how the unit that attacked the German base managed to conceal its presence and avoid detection. We also have no proof that the thermal sensor patrol lines are effective."
When I told him with some enthusiasm, Lieutenant Colonel Remel nodded deeply.
"That's true. Of course, we won't rely solely on heat sensors. We'll also continue to maintain radar surveillance and patrols by Wanzers. On top of that, you guys will be watching from the air, so I don't think it will be possible for even the stealthiest units to enter the new resource area undetected."
The lieutenant colonel then continued, smiling.
"Even so, your plan to set up an even longer patrol line on the periphery of the vast new resource zone without wasting manpower or combat power is truly brilliant. It

was well worth the trouble of having you come all the way here."
“I’m honored to receive the praise. However, the idea of using sensors to form a patrol line was suggested by another member, not mine.”
I replied with a wry smile, but Lieutenant Colonel Remel simply shook his head with a smile.
"Of course, it's natural for multiple people to pool their ideas together to create a good plan. And because you have great talent, you're able to be the central figure in the plan and bring the ideas together. In fact, incorporating other people's ideas into your own plan, and not monopolizing all the credit, is something I think is quite difficult to do, given your youth."
"No, not at all..."
Suddenly, I felt a strange awkwardness in my chest, and I felt a little embarrassed.
"Well, speaking of young, you are quite young yourself."
When I blurted out in frustration or panic, the lieutenant colonel responded very seriously.
"The reason I was promoted so quickly given my age is because I was in the unit that first introduced Wanzers to the Polish military. It's similar to the high ranks of test pilots and astronauts. However, nowadays, Wanzer units make up the mainstay of the Polish army, so it's not uncommon to find officers who serve as Wanzer pilots. Among them, I am being tested to see if I have the abilities worthy of the rank of lieutenant colonel."
"That's not a problem. As a commander, I believe you have excellent insight and judgment."
I said this seriously, without any flattery or anything, and Lieutenant Colonel Remel smiled again.
"thank you"
Then, perhaps sensing that the conversation was getting off track, Zead intervened.
"Now, we will now scatter heat source sensors from the transport plane to set up a patrol line, and then transition to aerial patrol."
"Yes, thank you very much."
With that, Lieutenant Colonel Remel gave a very natural salute. Durandal is not a military force, so it would be strange to return a military salute, but Zead, Latona, and I all returned the salute almost reflexively. It was perhaps fortunate that Hermes was not there.
"All right, sensor scattering is complete. There are no problems with the landing position or operation status."

Hermes announced after checking the instruments.
"For now, with this, we have done all the preparations we can do. Now, all that's left is to wait while patrolling to see if the raiding force really is coming."
"But will this German base raiding force actually come?"
Latona asked in a suspicious tone and I shook my head.
"I don't know. If my speculation is correct, and the raiding force is secretly connected to the German government, then it's possible that the fact that we came to the new resource area and lent our support to strengthening the security system was leaked to the raiding force by the Polish government, via the German government. If that's the case, it's possible that they're waiting until our defenses are down."
"That would be troublesome. The Polish military would not be able to continue this for long, as a state of high alert would place an excessive burden on personnel. Also, the operational lifespan of sensors once deployed is not that long."
Zead groaned, frowning.
"Well, on the other hand, if the assault forces don't move and the coastal alert is lifted, we may be able to count on the support of the air force. As for Durandal, Arrow 3 should be back soon, so we could ask him for reinforcements if the battle becomes protracted."
"If this really drags on, we can call in Arrow 4 instead of just Arrow 3. Although, Arrow 4 is still a little better than a cat's paw, at least."
As Latona spoke somewhat sarcastically, an alarm suddenly rang out inside the transport, and at the same time Hermes shouted loudly.
"West-side sensors are responding! Wanzer forces are invading!"
"You've arrived! Let's rush to the scene immediately!"
Zead responded immediately, issuing orders. The sensor reaction alert was not only sent to the Durandal transport, but also to the four Polish military bases. The commanders in charge of each base were probably ordering their Wanzer units to make an emergency launch. But the next moment, Hermes shouted in a hurry.
"Wait! This invading Wanzer unit is not a slow-moving long-distance attack force! Their invading speed is too fast! It's like they're a rocket!"
"What did you say?"
As Zead's face turned pale, Hermes told him a shocking truth while staring at the monitor.
"That's not the speed a Wanzer should be traveling at! I don't know what kind of equipment they're using, but I can only assume they're flying under their own power! The invading enemy are undoubtedly a high-speed assault force!"

"Then, where is the invasion force's target? The central base?"
Zead asked angrily, and Hermes answered immediately.
"No doubt about it! They're heading straight for us!"
"Elsa, send an urgent message to the central base! Advise them not to advance but to remain inside the base and intercept the assault force!"
"roger that!"
As soon as I received Zead's orders, I called the Polish Central Command.
"This is Durandal! Judging from the speed at which the invading Wanzer unit is moving, it appears to be a high-speed assault force! I recommend that you do not advance from your base, but instead wait for reinforcements from other bases while you fight on the defensive!"
"N-No way! I've already given the order to advance and intercept them, and sent out the Wanzers!"
The panicked voice that answered was not that of Lieutenant Colonel Remel. Without thinking, I raised my voice and shouted.
"In that case, please call back your troops immediately! Also, what happened to Lieutenant Colonel Remel? Did he leave leading the interception force?"
"No, Lieutenant Colonel, he's out on patrol leading a patrol... anyway, we're going to pull back the interception force!"
With that, someone at the Central Base Command Center hung up the phone without waiting for my reply. He was probably ordering the interception force commander to retreat. Then I was left half-stunned and dazed.
"What on earth were you thinking, Lieutenant Colonel, leading a patrol as your Commander-in-Chief?"
However, I also came to understand all too well the seemingly reckless methods of Lt. Colonel Remel. If a young Lt. Colonel who had been promoted as a Wanzer pilot just stayed in the command room acting like a commander, it would be difficult for him to convince the soldiers under his command. Only by getting in a Wanzer, taking the lead on the front lines, and sharing the risks and hardships with his subordinates, many of whom were older than him, could he win their trust, gain their respect, and lead the unit.
"...But if you die in battle, you'll lose all your popularity."
Of course, just because they were on patrol in the direction an assault force was approaching didn't mean they were guaranteed to encounter the enemy. But if they did encounter them, Lieutenant Colonel Remel would likely do everything in his power to stop the assault force, and if that happened, the annihilation of the patrol

would be inevitable. And the enemy would mercilessly shoot at the Wanzer pilots who escaped after their units were destroyed. "This is the central base patrol team, we have encountered an incursion force and are engaged in combat..."
At that moment, the broken voice of Lieutenant Colonel Remel suddenly came over the radio, and a chill ran through my body.
"The invasion force will use detachable disposable rockets... They will invade at incredible speeds... Their main weapon will be explosive grenades... Engaging in combat in the open is extremely dangerous... They will have to remain in their bases to deal with the situation..."
"Understood! The interception force that launched from the central base has already been instructed to return to the base! Therefore, you too should fall back!"
I shouted into the radio, but I wonder if the Lt. Colonel heard me. Lt. Colonel Remel's voice continued in a painful tone.
"The enemy is... relentlessly attacking the escaped pilots... to crush them. It's just as Durandal told us. The patrol unit has already... their units can't hold out any longer. I'm sorry, but I'll leave the rest to you..."
"Lieutenant Colonel!"
I screamed, but the radio didn't respond. Then, Captain Robert's tense voice echoed throughout the cabin.
"The central base is in sight. It looks like there's a lot of fighting going on. What should we do?"
"We'll airdrop in a Wanzer. Get as close as possible to the effective range of the explosive grenade cannon."
Zead complies without hesitation, and the captain clicks his tongue loudly.
"He'll tell you exactly what it is. Well, just pray that you don't get lucky."
"Thank you very much."
Saying this, Zead looked around at us and declared.
"let's go"
"Countdown, five, four, three, two, one, descend!"
At Captain Robert's signal, I launched the Wanzer into the air, and immediately afterwards, a loud explosion rang out behind us.
"The transport plane was destroyed?"
Just managing to stop myself from turning around reflexively, I concentrated on keeping the Wanzer in the air. Even if the transport plane was hit directly by an explosive cannon fired from the ground and blown to pieces, and Zead and Hermes, who were supposed to descend after me, were killed in action, all I could do was to

coordinate with the Latona unit, which had descended first, and fight the enemy on the ground with all my might. And as soon as we landed, my Wanzer fired against my will. The Latona unit was fighting nearby, so a linked attack was activated.
"There it is!"
As the enemy unit fires its shotgun at me with a link attack, I change position and fire more with my machine gun. The enemy unit's explosive cannon explodes, blowing its arm away.
"Leave the unarmed enemy behind! There are plenty of other enemies that we must deal with first!"
As I was about to give chase, Latona gave me orders in a sharp voice, and weaved swiftly through the base, which was lined with resource extraction facilities. I tried my best to keep up with her. Then, Latona's machine jumped out from between the facilities, attacked a large Wanzer that was aiming its explosive cannon at the Polish Wanzers, and smashed in its pile bunker.
"received!"
My Wanzer jumped sideways to avoid being in the shadow of Latona's machine, and first fired its shotgun using automatic linking, followed by its machine gun. The targeted Wanzer lost its explosive shell cannon and arm, and was rendered unable to fight. It was then that I realized something. Latona was prioritizing putting the enemy machine in a position to be unable to fight over destroying it, so it was attacking its explosive shell cannon and arms rather than its torso. I was amazed at how calm it was in this situation. Then, an enemy Wanzer, who was quite a distance away, fired its explosive shell cannon at Latona's machine. Latona dodged it at the last moment, but was knocked off balance by the blast. I tried to aim my machine at the enemy Wanzer that was aiming its explosive shell cannon, but I was still too far away. The enemy machine then re-aimed its explosive shell cannon towards me. At that moment, a missile came flying from the side and hit the enemy plane's fuselage head on. Taking advantage of the enemy plane's swaying moment, my Wanzer jumped into the range of the gun and mercilessly fired a barrage of shots. Normally, the enemy plane would have been damaged to the point that the pilot would have had to escape, but as expected, it erupted in flames and self-destructed.
"Zead, you're safe!"
Quickly moving away from the self-destructing enemy Wanzer, I called out to the Wanzer that had been firing missiles at me from the side. There was no mistaking the strange silhouette of this hybrid Wanzer, consisting of the fuselage of a Valiant F heavy support Wanzer made by Diable Avionics, a major USN military contractor, and

the legs of an OCU-based Iguchi Quint. Really, to airdrop from a damaged transport plane in such an obviously unbalanced machine, Zead's skill was at a godlike level. And Zead quickly responded.
"Hermes and I managed to airborne, but our transport plane was hit by an explosive grenade and had to make an emergency landing. We can't expect support from the air, but we must hurry and repel the enemy."
"There are two enemy Wanzers over there! Let's go, Elsa!"
With a brief command, Latona's machine took off. I, Zead's machine, and Hermes' machine, which had appeared timidly from the other side of Zead's machine, all took off running after Latona's machine. Right now, all emotions were frozen - joy that my comrades were safe, anger at the ruthless enemy, sadness, hatred, regret - all these emotions were frozen. I had to fight the enemy with all my might.
"Enemy aircraft spotted. We'll fire a missile first."
Zead declares, firing a missile over the building of the facility. The explosive shell cannon has a long range, but of course it cannot retaliate beyond the building. Thankfully, one of the enemy aircraft is hit directly in the arm by a missile, blowing away its explosive shell cannon.
"Nice shot, Zead!"
Immediately, Latona's unit leapt out from behind a building, ignoring the weaponless Wanzer and attacking the other unit. I tried to follow her lead, but the unarmed enemy forced its way in between us.
"obstacle!"
Shouting out loud without even realizing it, I mercilessly opened fire on the enemy Wanzer that had lost an arm from close range. The me from before, that is, an hour ago, might have hesitated a little, but now I don't have that luxury. I push the unarmed enemy aside and forcefully move forward, firing my machine gun. The shotgun is linked to the Latona's attack, so it automatically targets the enemy and fires. At that moment, a Polish Wanzer appears from behind a building and opens fire on the enemy. The two enemy planes, which were already at a disadvantage, instantly receive fatal damage and burst into flames, self-destructing. The Polish Wanzer pilot, who narrowly avoided the explosion, asks in a bewildered tone, speaking in heavily accented English.
"Are you guys Durandal? What on earth are these guys? They didn't even try to escape, instead they committed suicide..."
"We don't have time to talk! There are still enemies out there, aren't there?"
I instinctively replied in a stern tone, and then Zead's voice came through the

headset.
"Central Base Command has announced that the invading forces have begun to withdraw. It seems the Polish military has given orders not to pursue them too far, but we will pursue the retreating enemy. We can't use transport planes either, but it seems the large rockets the enemy used for their high-speed invasion are detachable and disposable. If they are withdrawing on foot using their Wanzers, then hopefully we can catch up with them."
"roger that!"
I immediately responded and headed toward the Zead plane. Then, a Polish soldier asked me anxiously.
"What should we do?"
"Of course, you should follow the orders of the headquarters."
With those words, I drove off in my van. If Lieutenant Colonel Remel had been alive, he might have gone out of his way to provide some kind of support, but that was something I should not hope for. In that situation, there was no chance that there would be any survivors in the patrol that had been annihilated in combat with a ruthless enemy. At that moment, I suddenly felt tears welling up in my eyes. Lieutenant Colonel Remel, who had praised my plan for the excellent plan, was dead. He was dead.

MISSION 5:
Wandering

"What is this? I feel like I've overlooked something ridiculous."
While chasing the troops that attacked the new resource area in Poland in a Wanzer, I was silently dazzled. The attacking forces discarded the large rockets they had used to attack and retreated by walking the Wanzer, but their speed was almost the same as that of the pursuing Durandal side. In other words, unless there was some change in the situation, the gap would not widen or close. When Zead confirmed that repairing the transport plane that had made an emergency landing would not be easy, he contacted Durandal headquarters and requested that a replacement transport plane be sent immediately. However, since there was no spare plane on standby at all times, Zead did not know at this stage how long it would take to arrange for a replacement plane and pilot. In addition, to fly from Durandal headquarters to Poland, it would be even more troublesome since it would have to cross the skies over Germany, which was under high alert. Meanwhile, Zead had also sent out a request for support to the Polish Air Force and the German Air Force, but there was no response from them. The Hermes plane, equipped with a high-performance sensor backpack, intercepted radio signals and found that there had been an attack on the German Kiel base at roughly the same time as the new resource area was attacked, and it seemed that the air forces of both Poland and Germany were overwhelmed with requests from their own nations. So the four Wanzers we were aboard continued to advance through the mountains of Poland in the deep darkness, relying only on the reactions of our sensor devices.
"How far are they planning to walk in a Wanzer? I thought they had a trailer or something waiting."
Hermes's suspicious groaning voice came through the headset.
“Well, as long as the Wanzers over there are operational, we can track their patterns with detectors. But even so, do you really think they’re going to let an armed Wanzer just cross the border?”
"If you continue in this direction you will end up at the German border."
Zead's voice responded in a rather heavy tone.
"If our guess is correct and the raiders are in cahoots with the German government, we may be the ones stopped at the border."
"But wouldn't that be like admitting they were in on it?"
Zead pauses for a moment before responding to Hermes' question.
"That alone will only deepen suspicion, but it won't be conclusive evidence. Cases where investigators who have cast a net overlook the real culprit and end up catching the pursuer are possible due to a very simple mistake or the person in charge being a

little bit clueless."
"What's even more frightening is being ambushed without any warning."
Latona interjects, sounding a little annoyed.
"Even if the German army doesn't get involved, the assault force surely has plenty of rocket- and missile-equipped Wanzers in reserve, right? If we miss an ambush, we could be easily annihilated with a single long-range simultaneous attack, without even being able to fight back."
"I know. That's why you're using your high-performance sensor backpack and carefully exploring as you go."
When Hermes protested, Latona snapped back.
"In that case, stop talking nonsense and focus on your exploration. If you make a mistake, we could all be wiped out in an instant."
"So I'm doing it properly."
Hermes replied in a sulky voice, and at that moment a question that had been troubling me ever since we began our pursuit of the raiding party suddenly took shape.
"I wonder why the assault force saved the support-type Wanzers? Normally, they would send in a high-speed assault force first, and then have them carry out a support attack. Rockets can't be used in a melee, but missiles should be fine."
"That's certainly true. Once the explosive shell equipped units had rushed in, the intercepting force would no longer be able to advance to the position of the supporting attack force. In that situation, if they had been supported by missiles from the rear, it would have been a much more unfavorable development."
As Zead agrees, Latona points out.
"Normally, when providing missile support from the rear, at least one Wanzer carrying a missile guidance sensor backpack must go ahead. However, this time, it seems that the backpack connector on the back was connected to the large launch case, which is normally used for the assault, and that's why it couldn't be guided."
"That means the unit that attacked the German base and the unit that's now attacking the new resource area have absolutely nothing in common, in terms of equipment or tactics. How could this be possible if the same unit trapped in Germany was conducting both attacks?"
Something is strange. I must be missing something. Thinking this, I feel dazzled.
"The submarines have withdrawn from Denmark, so the raiding force should no longer be able to receive reinforcements or supplies. And yet, what on earth is going on with the sudden appearance of a force equipped with explosive shells that is

willing to throw away special equipment such as large assault rockets that are not officially adopted by any other military force? I don't know where the raiding force's home country is, but I can only think that they are sending in the necessary forces depending on the situation."
"Germany has no direct border with any country outside the European Community. Even if the entire German government and army were to betray the European Community, it would be impossible for foreign troops to enter by land."
Zead groaned in a confused tone.
"But is it possible to send supplies by air or sea under the current circumstances? Even if Germany deliberately overlooked it, would it be possible for it to pass through undetected by the neighboring countries? Common sense tells us that it cannot be."
"There's no point in thinking about those questions now."
Latona declared with a firm expression.
"Anyway, for now, we have no choice but to steadily pursue those fleeing guys. If we can keep pursuing them without losing contact until the transport arrives from HQ, then we'll be able to see victory."
"That's right."
Zead agreed, and we continued our pursuit in silence for a while. Then, soon after, Hermes spoke in a nervous tone.
"The assault force has crossed the German border. There are no signs of anything in the vicinity that could be considered a wanzer, helicopter, aircraft, or large vehicle."
"Aren't there any German troops patrolling the border?"
Zead confirmed this, and Hermes replied.
"At least, they're not within the range that can be seen with my advanced sensory backpack. The Kiel base has been attacked, so I think they're directing all their forces towards the coast."
"That may be true for the Air Force, but the Army's deployment is not something that can be changed so easily. Five bases have been destroyed, and it's true that there are large holes in the structure, but it's strange that they're not patrolling the borders, especially in times of emergency."
Latona groaned in a tone that clearly indicated she was not happy with the idea, but Zead made an immediate decision.
"For now, we can assume that they are not there, so we have no choice but to continue our pursuit. Hermes, please continue to sense for anything that has appeared in the surrounding area."
"Yeah, I know."

Hermes replied in an unusually firm tone. After a while, he muttered,
"We've reached the German border. There's nothing around... No, several Wanzers have appeared from the north!"
"From the North? Are there any identification signals?"
Hermes paused for a moment before answering Zead's question.
"Identification signal confirmed. German Wanzer. Belongs to... Blauer Nebel!"
"...I should say it was a coincidence. Or maybe they were just waiting for this. Anyway, let's try contacting them."
Glancing bitterly, Zead tuned his radio to the EC military general-purpose frequency and made a call.
"This is Durandal, the EC land tactics research institute. We are pursuing an armed Wanzer of unknown affiliation that has attacked a new resource area in Poland. Our detectors indicate that there are six Wanzers in question. They have invaded Germany from Poland, and are currently moving west-southwest, about fifteen kilometers west of our position. We are requesting the cooperation of the German military in order to capture them."
However, the Wanzer unit belonging to Blauer Nebel that appeared from the north made no attempt to respond, and instead quickly headed south, approaching. Eight of them in total.
"What will you do, Zead?"
Hermes asked in an impatient voice, to which Zead replied in a stern tone.
"Anyway, I guess we'll just have to keep pursuing the raiding force."
And with that, Zead crossed the German border and headed west, and at that moment, with a distinctive high-pitched sound, a bullet from the armor-piercing cannon passed directly above Zead, slightly above the head of the Wanzer.
"He shot me!"
"Hmph, no need to ask questions."
Dazzling with defiance, the Latona plane turns north.
"What are you going to do, Leader? If you don't do something, you'll just get done for."
"It seems that's the case. We'll have to brush off the sparks that have fallen on us."
With that, Zead's machine fired a missile at Blauer Nebel's Wanzer, which was equipped with an armor-piercing shell cannon, with a thunderous roar. Now there was no turning back.
"Let's go, Elsa!"
"yes!"

The Latona machine took off, and I immediately followed suit. First and foremost, the enemy I should target was the machine equipped with an armor-piercing shell cannon, commonly known as the Sniper, which attacks from long distances with a one-hit kill. Although it is inferior in overall destructive power to the explosive shell cannon, the powerful armor-piercing shells penetrate the armor of the Wanzer and destroy its internal mechanisms, so if the computer core, power reactor, or cockpit are shot through, it will be rendered inoperable with one hit. And the way to deal with a Wanzer equipped with an armor-piercing shell cannon is the same as with long-range attack aircraft, to approach as quickly as possible and bring the battle into a melee. The Latona machine rushed towards the Blauer Nebel's armor-piercing shell-equipped Wanzer, which was staggering after being hit by a missile fired by Zead, with the force of a carnivorous animal attacking its prey. A metallic sound rang out, and the Latona machine's pile bunker pierced the arm of the armor-piercing shell cannon-equipped Wanzer. At the same time, my Wanzer linked up with the enemy's shotgun and fired a barrage of shotgun shells, breaking the enemy's arm and causing the armor-piercing cannon to explode. But the next moment, a second Wanzer equipped with an armor-piercing cannon, positioned at the rear, fired armor-piercing shells at Latona's machine. Latona tried to protect its body with the shield equipped on its right arm, but the shield was shot through in one hit, and sparks and black smoke rose from its arm.
"You!"
Letting out a roar of rage, Latona ran off to close the distance with the armor-piercing cannon-equipped Wanzer. However, several Wanzers jumped out with machine guns and shotguns in both hands to block her path. Furthermore, a large Wanzer equipped with an explosive cannon appeared from behind the armor-piercing cannon-equipped Wanzer and began firing.
"Elsa, take down the enemy plane!"
"yes!"
Realizing that it would be difficult to close in on the Wanzer in the rear, which was equipped with the long-range weapons of an explosive shell cannon and an armor-piercing shell cannon, Latona jumped into the armour of the dual-weapon-equipped Wanzer at the front of the enemy force, and just like in the simulation, slammed a pile bunker into its computer core. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to disable it in one hit, so I fired my machine gun and shotgun at the same time. A burst of black smoke gushed out from the hole made by the pile bunker, and the pilot was ejected from the disabled Wanzer along with his cockpit. Then, with no more

need to hold back, the explosive shell cannon fired from long range hit the disabled Wanzer whose pilot had escaped. Of course, in reality, the attack was probably aimed at Latona's machine and missed, but the disabled Wanzer that received a direct hit instantly exploded spectacularly and collapsed. The Latona machine quickly jumped down to avoid the explosion, but a second dual-weapon equipped Wanzer that was circling around to attack was caught in the explosion and nearly fell onto its back, just managing to stay standing.
"slow!"
Without giving the off-balance dual-weapon Wanzer time to regain its balance, Latona's unit closed in from the side and drove a pile bunker into its fuselage. The hit pierced its computer core perfectly in one hit, and before I could launch an additional attack, the Wanzer was disabled and the pilot was ejected. I watched as the first pilot ejected from the escape device tried to retreat without armour, but I didn't have time to worry about that now. Changing position to avoid becoming a target for the explosive shells and armour-piercing shells, I fired my machine gun at the three dual-weapon Wanzers that were approaching one after the other. Since the distance was far and we were firing while moving, I hardly hit any targets, but since this was a diversionary attack I didn't mind. Then, a missile fired by Zead's unit from behind hit one of the dual-weapon Wanzers. The Wanzer that was hit by the missile did not become disabled, but it seemed to have sustained damage to its legs and its forward speed visibly dropped. Seeing this, Latona's unit, which was about to charge in, suddenly dropped back. Certainly, there was no need to go out of my way to get close to the Wanzer with its legs damaged and give it a chance to fire. I followed her lead and retreated, firing my machine gun. The two undamaged Wanzers equipped with dual weapons returned fire with their own machine guns and advanced to close the distance, but at that moment Zead's missiles came charging at us again. The missiles exploded with a thunderous roar, and thick black smoke rose from the joints of the Wanzers that had taken a direct hit.
"now!"
I quickly jumped forward and slashed the two enemy planes with my machine gun. Just as I had planned, the Wanzer, hit by the missile, exploded and stopped moving, and the pilot was ejected and eliminated. Meanwhile, the Latona also immediately charged forward and attacked the remaining plane with a pile bunker. The two-weapon-equipped Wanzer, damaged by the machine gun, dodged the attack of the Latona surprisingly quickly, but my Wanzer, which was moving forward, fired a shotgun in a linked attack. And the moment the enemy plane's attention turned to me,

the Latona plane slammed its right arm head-on, along with the shield that had been shot through by the armor-piercing shell. This blow seemed to have completely caught the enemy plane off guard. The impact of the punch caused the enemy plane to lose its balance completely and fall on its buttocks. I then mercilessly fired both my machine gun and shotgun at it. Then, an explosion sounded a little way off. Looking, I saw that the Wanzer whose leg had been destroyed by Zead's missile earlier had been hit again by a direct missile and was about to collapse. With this, one each of the explosive shell cannon-equipped machine and the armor-piercing shell cannon-equipped machine remained. And one Wanzer, whose arm had been destroyed first and lost its weapon, was wandering around, but it was okay to ignore it unless it tried to ram into us. The pilots whose machines had been disabled and ejected didn't seem crazy enough to try and pick a fight with the Wanzer with their personal weapons. And the remaining explosive shell cannon-equipped machine and the armor-piercing shell cannon-equipped machine advanced side by side. It seemed to be a plan to put Zead's machine, which was behind us, within their range, but of course, I had no intention of letting them do that without saying a word. All we could do was close the distance and attack. However, if we approached straight ahead we would only become targets, so both Latona's machine and my Wanzer ran in a zigzag pattern, looking for an opening to close the distance. The machine equipped with an armor-piercing cannon fired a shot in my direction, but since it was also moving, my aim was poor. Without even grazing me, the armor-piercing shell made a distinctive high-pitched sound as it flew away. Suddenly, a Wanzer that had lost an arm came running towards me. It was a nuisance, if used properly, but it could also be a shield. Just as I had that thought, the Wanzer equipped with an explosive cannon started attacking me.
"Huh?"
I dodged instantly, and in the next moment, my eyes widened. To my surprise, the Wanzer equipped with an explosive shell cannon had clearly aimed and fired not at me, but at my friendly Wanzer who had lost an arm. Hit directly by the powerful explosive shell, the Wanzer was rendered inoperable without a moment's hesitation, exploding and ejecting the pilot. And in the next moment, a machine equipped with an armor-piercing shell cannon aimed and fired at my Wanzer, and although I hadn't intended to be distracted, perhaps my reaction was slow, as the bullet hit the arm equipped with the machine gun.
"Tsk!"
Ignoring the red light on the control panel, indicating that some of the units were out

of action, I continued to close the distance between me and the enemy unit. It was annoying that I felt like I'd fallen for a trick, but when fighting a Wanzer equipped with a long-range weapon, I had to prepare to be hit by two bullets as I closed the distance. Whether or not it would be a fatal blow was probably a matter of luck, not skill. Moreover, while the two enemy units were attacking me, Latona's unit was steadily closing the distance. Certainly, according to common sense in Wanzer battles, it is not wrong to prioritize attacking a unit equipped with dual weapons over one equipped with melee weapons, but they didn't know just how amazing she was. Furthermore, Zead's unit advanced and fired a missile. The unit equipped with the armor-piercing shell received a direct hit, and Latona's unit immediately launched an attack. My Wanzer's balance was off due to the loss of one of its arms, and it was still unable to close in to the range of the shotgun. Of course, the arm equipped with the shield on Latona's machine shouldn't be functioning properly either, so this is a matter of skill. The pile bunker on Latona's machine pierces the arm of the machine equipped with the armor-piercing shell cannon, destroying the weapon. Up until that point, everything was fine, but then the machine equipped with the explosive shell cannon fires forcefully from almost point-blank range. Receiving the blast from the explosive shell, both the machine equipped with the armor-piercing shell cannon and Latona's machine are blown away, and the pilot of the machine equipped with the armor-piercing shell cannon is ejected from the machine equipped with the armor-piercing shell cannon.
"What a guy! He has no qualms about shooting his comrades?"
Even though there is an escape device and the risk to one's life is low, this tactic goes against the code of honor of a Wanzer pilot. To be honest, I absolutely do not want to fight alongside such a guy. Indignantly, I close the distance and fire my shotgun at the Wanzer equipped with an explosive shell cannon. However, this Wanzer is large and its armor is thick, so it is not even shaken by a single hit from the shotgun. If I fire the machine gun at the same time, it might have some effect, but the machine gun doesn't react at all. The enemy machine then readjusts its explosive shell cannon and aims it at me. Of course, I have no obligation to just let myself be shot while being targeted, so I fire my shotgun while dodging the tip of the explosive shell cannon. With the distance this close, it becomes even more difficult to hit with the long-range explosive shell cannon and armor-piercing shell cannon. At that moment, Zead's unit fired missiles, and even the large Wanzer began to spew smoke from all over its armor. I, too, busily deflected the tip of my explosive shell cannon, which was swinging left and right, and without even aiming properly, just fired my shotgun wildly.

Then, Latona's unit somehow managed to get up and slammed into the enemy with all its might, as if it was going to ram it. At that moment, there was a loud explosion, and black smoke and flames spurted out with great force from the hole the pile bunker had made. I turned pale for a moment, thinking that it couldn't possibly be self-destructing, but the spewing flames and smoke quickly lost momentum, and the pilot was ejected.
"Somehow, it seems that the matter has been resolved."
Latona's voice, sounding tired after all, came from the headset.
"But the most important attacking force managed to escape. Damn it, it's impossible."
"There's no other way. Let's ask the people of Blauer Nebel why they attacked us and let the raiding force escape."
Saying this, I aimed the shotgun at the escape device that had been launched from the large Wanzer and made a declaration using the external megaphone.
"Do you hear me? If you run away, I'll shoot you. I'm not threatening you. I've taken your captain's example and decided not to make empty threats."
"So, what should we do?"
Zead groaned, sounding lost for words.
"We can't stay here forever, but if the Germans don't respond to our calls, there's nothing we can do."
"I agree"
Hermes's reply also lacked his usual vigor. After our unwilling battle with Blauer Nebel, we were at a complete stalemate. First of all, the damage to the Wanzer was severe. Zead's and Hermes' were unscathed, but the arm equipped with the machine gun on my Wanzer was inoperable. Latona's right arm, which was equipped with a shield, was completely blown off, and its legs were severely damaged. In particular, Latona's legs were in such a serious condition that it would not be surprising if it became unable to walk at any time. Hermes' opinion was that the only way to repair it was to replace the entire leg parts, but of course, in the current situation, there was no way to carry spare leg parts. And the Polish new resource area raiding force that we had been pursuing so far had completely disappeared from the effective range of Hermes' high-performance sensor. Even if we wanted to resume the pursuit, Latona's machine could not be moved carelessly, and if we left it behind, its fighting power would be reduced by more than half. Furthermore, there was also the problem of what to do with the Blauer Nebel pilots that we had taken prisoner. The pilot of a large Wanzer equipped with an explosive shell cannon was in command of the Blauer

Nebel unit. The red-haired pilot, with a boyish appearance that was hard to imagine given his violent tactics that would casually take allies in, introduced himself as Captain Drantz, and answered Zead's questioning with a sulky look, but didn't say anything that would be useful to us. According to Drantz, they were patrolling the Polish border when they discovered a suspicious armed Wanzer, and after asking who it was, they ordered it to leave, but there was no response. They fired warning shots, which were met with missiles, so they were forced to engage in combat. They didn't see any of the assault troops that were supposed to have been there before, and they didn't receive any notice from Durandal. If they were suspicious, they were told, as if they were being defiant, that the escape device had communication records, so they could check them as much as they wanted, which left them with no choice. Of course, Hermes had checked Dranz's communication records, but these types of electronic records could easily be forged by anyone with a little knowledge and skill, so they were of no use in determining whether what he was saying was true or not.
“It’s unusual for our declaration to go unheeded by anyone on the other side, but I can’t say it’s impossible. We don’t use the EC military general-purpose frequency all the time, after all.”
Saying that, Hermes sighed.
"Either way, it's hard to prove that Blauer Nebel was intentionally sabotaging us... Snack?"
"what up?"
Zead asked, and Hermes suddenly replied in an excited voice.
"Yes! A transport plane has arrived from Durandal HQ! Bosch is piloting it, and it looks like it's already approaching!"
"Bosch?"
I asked, hearing the name for the first time, and Zead immediately explained.
"Bosch is the real name of Arrow 3 who was in Iceland. Apparently, as soon as he returned to HQ, he piloted a transport plane and rushed over."
Saying that, Zead continued with a wry smile.
"Well, if the transport can come, we can at least replace the parts on the Wanzer."
After the Blauer Nebel pilots boarded the transport plane that had landed vertically and were tucked into a room that could be locked from the outside, I put the damaged Wanzer in the hangar. Then, when I got out of the Wanzer with him and removed my headset, I saw a strange man standing there with Zead, Latona, and Hermes. He seemed to be in his mid-thirties. He was a small man, slightly shorter than Latona, and had a calm appearance, but was a little carefree and friendly. I got

the impression that he wasn't a bad person, but to be honest, he didn't look very impressive. He was wearing a Durandal Wanzer pilot uniform, but looked more like an ordinary mechanic or engineer than a soldier. However, this person was probably a capable former German soldier and Durandal member, who Zead had commented would definitely be useful if he was there, as he was well-informed and had a high level of intelligence analysis ability. You can't judge a book by its cover, and a good hawk hides its claws, I thought to myself without saying a word.
"Nice to meet you. I'm Elsa Eliane, Arrow 6."
"Arrow 3, I'm Dieter Bosch. I don't really like my first name, so I'd prefer if you called me Bosch."
After exchanging a brief greeting with me, who we were meeting for the first time, Bosch turned to Zead and asked him in a drawn-out tone.
"So, what are we going to do now?"
"Firstly, we'll be getting the Arrow 2 and Arrow 6 Wanzers up to speed. It shouldn't take long if we can get Hermes to replace the parts."
Zead responded with a slight frown.
"After that, we'll have no choice but to hand the Blauer Nebel guys over to the German army. There's no way we can bring them back to Durandal HQ or the EC parliament. And we can't search Germany endlessly for the escaped raiding force. I can't say it's all of them, but some of the German government and the German army are probably secretly connected to the raiding force. If we stayed too long, they'd definitely find fault with us and kick us out."
"Hmm."
Bosch snorted lightly and walked over to the monitor, bringing up a map.
"Hermes, approximately where were the raiding party when they moved out of range of the advanced detectors?"
"Um, it's around here. From here, it moved away in a southwesterly direction."
Saying this, Hermes pointed to a spot on the map, and Bosch nodded slightly.
"I see. In that case, there is still a possibility that we can track down their footsteps. It is just a possibility, though."
"What is the possibility of that?"
When I asked enthusiastically, Bosch responded slowly.
"The direction they were moving in is the Dresden airbase. The radar there, or the air patrol planes taking off and landing, may have picked up the moving Wanzers. If we compare that with the data Hermes has obtained from the new resource areas in Poland, we'll immediately know if it's an assault force or not."

"However, no matter how many times we called out to them while we were on the move, there was no response from Dresden Air Base. Even if we asked to see the radar and air patrol aircraft surveillance records, I don't think they would cooperate."
When Zead pointed this out, Bosch smiled.
"Well, even if a request for cooperation was sent out from a mysterious Wanzer, it would have been right after the army base was destroyed. They would likely be wary that it might be a trap and not even respond. But if a plane that had previously registered itself as a transport belonging to the EC Land Tactics Research Institute Durandal asked to land in order to hand over the Blauer Nebel soldiers, would they still pretend not to know anything? I think they would at least allow it to land and hand over the personnel. And once we're inside, a comrade who struggled with me at Huffman is working as a data analyst at Dresden Air Base. If we ask him, he might be able to show us the data in secret."
"Well, thank you!"
cried Hermes, clapping her hands.
"Well then, let's head to Dresden base right away!"
"But if the assault force's Wanzers had stopped working while Blauer Nebel was holding us back and were housed in trailers or something, wouldn't they be able to be detected even if they were passing by the Dresden base?"
Bosch gave a simple answer to Latona's skeptical question.
"So it's just a possibility. If it doesn't work, it's just a given. Let's just give it a try."
"That's certainly true."
Latona nodded with an understanding look. I see, it would be rude to say that Bosch can be deceptive, but he really is no ordinary person, I thought. Even though he had only just arrived at the scene, he accurately grasped the situation and immediately drew out a possible solution, easily convincing the tricky members of Durandal.
"Well then, let's go."
Bosch declared nonchalantly and headed for the cockpit.
"How about it? Can you send me the data?"
As Hermes asked enthusiastically, Bosch slowly waved one hand at her.
"Yes, don't panic. No matter how much my comrades may be willing to listen to your request, the German Air Force is currently on high alert. There's no way they're going to leak classified information to the outside so easily."
"Yes. If it were discovered, I'd be court-martialed for sure."
I nodded and Hermes frowned in slight annoyance.
"I know that too. But the more time passes, the less chance we have of chasing the

raiding force. Even if you tell me not to panic, it's impossible."
"I understand how you feel, but there's nothing good in panicking."
Bosch responded in a calm tone and operated the handheld communication device in his hand. The transport plane has already landed at the Dresden base airfield, but can he hand it over to me instead of using the communication device installed on the transport plane?
"If there is no other way, then I guess there is no other way. To be honest, I'd rather check it myself."
Reluctantly, Hermes nodded, and Bosch responded with a grin.
"Sorry. Well, give me the data then. I'll give them a copy."
"Understood"
Without further ado, Hermes operated the terminal on the transport plane to retrieve the data. Bosch then took over from Hermes, operating the terminal with a practiced look, and sending the data using his own portable communication device. I'm not completely incapable of using computers, but it seems that their skill level is far above mine.
"Now, all that's left is to wait for the results."
Bosch stretched out slightly, as if he had just finished a job. So I asked him something that had been bothering me.
"Um, you said that you and your comrades struggled together at Huffman, but did you take part in the Huffman Campaign?"
"Yeah, I was deployed as a peacekeeper with the Hengchun Peacekeeping Force. It was a horrible experience."
Bosch sighed and responded. His expression showed that he didn't want to remember, so I quickly apologized. He was in contact with someone he called a comrade using a mobile communication device owned by a human. Moreover, he didn't talk to him directly, but exchanged what appeared to be emails, so unless Bosch explained it, it was unclear whether the talks had progressed to Hermes.
Incidentally, Zead and Latona were meeting with the base commander to hand over the Blauer Nebel pilots. Just as Bosch had predicted, the Dresden base commander agreed to the handover of the Blauer Nebel pilots and only allowed the Durandal transport plane to land within the base, but it was clear from the communication requesting the landing that he was very bothered and wanted them to leave as soon as their business was over. At that rate, even if he asked for cooperation directly, he would definitely be turned away, and even if he tried to drag out the talk, it didn't seem like he would be able to buy much time.

"Okay, looks like we have an answer. Let's see..."
Bosch glanced calmly at the small display screen of his mobile phone. To an outsider, it looked like the kind of unsolicited sales email commonly known as spam that is often sent to personal mobile phones, but it seemed that he and his comrades were mixing encrypted information into the email and using it for secret communication.
"Hmm... It seems that it's not possible to leak the data to the outside. However, if you give us the data to check, we can compare it and let you know the results. So, Hermes, I'm going to give you the data on the Wanzer that attacked the new resource area in Poland.
"Oh, I guess I made you remember something unpleasant. I'm sorry."
"No, there's no need to worry about it. Besides, you can talk to me normally. We're both members of Durandal after all."
Bosch said with a wry smile and began to speak slowly.
"At first, I headed for Huffman Island in high spirits as well. The German military's Wanzer operation was said to be advanced among the EC countries, but it was clearly lagging behind compared to the USN and OCU militaries, which had been hardened in actual combat. I thought I'd use this opportunity to see new tactics for myself and, if possible, learn some. However, when I actually got to Huffman Island, I found that the peacekeeping forces' main mission was to hunt down guerrillas, no questions asked. Well, even though they were guerrillas, they were using fairly high-performance Wanzers, and although we were lucky not to encounter them, they included veteran mercenaries from the OCU military, and they were such a formidable opponent that even the Zaftra forces, the core of the peacekeeping forces, had a hard time fighting them. For that reason, guerrilla hunting was carried out thoroughly, and horrific incidents involving ordinary citizens were frequent. In fact, I wouldn't dare say this in front of Latona, but the Zaftra army at that time did things that made me wonder how they were trying to maintain peace. What's more, we, the troops dispatched from EC, were assigned to support the Zaftra forces. We were given only worthless tasks like clearing the way for others to escape, cleaning up after the enemy, and acting as a decoy for diversionary tactics. There were an unusually high number of casualties for a Wanzer battle, and transport planes and supply units were also attacked. In guerrilla warfare, there is no honor or tacit understanding like there is when regular armies fight each other."
Saying that, Bosch sighed deeply.
"And after all that you've been through, it would be crazy not to be upset if it was revealed that the Second Huffman Conflict was a collusion war between the USN and

OCU, who were supposed to be parties to the conflict, and even ZAFTRA, and that justice was on the side of the guerrillas. When most Wanzer pilots who were involved in guerrilla hunting, both in the German and British armies, found out the truth about the Huffman Conflict, they couldn't bear it and left the military. I was one of them, but some even suffered serious mental problems after worrying about it. I consider myself one of the lucky ones, to be able to continue driving a Wanzer even after leaving the military."
"...I'm sorry for reminding you."
When I apologized, Bosch chuckled again.
"Well, it's easier to talk about these experiences. Besides, this incident somehow reminded me of my experience at Huffman. The tactics of ambush and annihilation without question, and the Wanzers choosing to commit suicide rather than be taken prisoner."
"So you mean uncompromising guerrilla warfare?"
In response to Hermes' question, Bosch frowned slightly and tilted his head.
"Maybe so. If anything, it seems like there's some huge conspiracy going on behind the scenes, and they're fighting so brutally to cover it up. It's not simple terrorism or guerrilla warfare."
"Hmm, I see."
Just as Hermes groaned in confusion, Bosch's portable communicator emitted a receiving tone.
"Oh, here it comes."
"That was unexpectedly quick."
Hermes seemed surprised by this, and Bosch responded with a wry smile while operating his portable communication device.
"Yes, that's true. The longer it takes, the greater the risk of it being revealed."
"Oh, I see"
But if that's the case, won't they be able to make a sufficient match? Hermes whispered, glaring at him. Bosch transferred the data he had received from the portable communication device to the transport plane's computer and decrypted it using the terminal. And, as soon as he read the data, it seemed to me that Bosch's expression became a little grim.
"This... I guess we'll just have to let Zead decide how to deal with this."
"what's up?"
When Hermes asked, Bosch explained with a complicated look on his face.
"The results of the comparison are as follows. The Wanzer, which we believe to be an

assault force, moves in a west-southwest direction for a while from the point where we lost sight of it, but stops and disappears when it reaches the main road. It's likely that the Wanzer was loaded onto a waiting trailer and deactivated. Up to that point, that's as we would expect, but after that, the reaction reappeared in an incredible place."
"An incredible place?"
Hermes's question and mine happened to overlap, and Bosch answered succinctly.
"It's an undisclosed German Army base. The data notes that it is used by Blauer Nebel."
"Well then..."
I hesitated for a moment and swallowed the words that were about to come out of my mouth. Bosch's expression had always been rather blank, but suddenly, a shadow of what could be described as sadness appeared on his face. However, unlike me, Hermes did not hesitate.
"Blauer Nebel is hiding the raiding party. So they were part of it after all."
"I have no choice but to reach that conclusion. I wonder if Commander Wagner is aware of this, or if he has no knowledge of it. No, no matter what the situation, Wagner is neither tolerant nor stupid enough to not notice when his subordinates do as they please."
Bosch looked dazzled, almost as if talking to himself. Then Hermes asked in surprise.
"Do you know Wagner? Personally?"
“We were in the same year at the military academy. He enrolled right after graduating from high school, but I joined the military after taking a long detour to college, so there’s quite an age difference between us.”
Bosch said, sighing.
"Wagner was a quiet and excellent guy even when he was an officer cadet, but although he was usually cold-hearted, he had a strangely extreme side, and people said that it was hard to know what he was thinking. But I never would have imagined that he would be teaming up with people who were ruthlessly annihilating an army base..."
"But facts are facts. Let's go to that undisclosed base right away and get irrefutable evidence!"
Bosch spoke to an enraged Hermes with a difficult expression.
"Even if we showed up, I don't think Wagner would readily admit his guilt. If his personality hasn't changed, it's only natural that we'd be turned away, and it's even possible that they'd resort to force. No, in the worst case scenario, this reaction could

be a trap to lure us out. There's no way Wagner wouldn't have predicted that we were in Poland, and that we'd obtained the operation patterns from the Wanzers of the assault force. Despite that, the fact that he's ostentatiously operating the Wanzers and reacting like that seems very suspicious."
"But that doesn't mean we can leave it alone, right?"
When I spoke in an unintentionally accusatory tone, Bosch tilted his head.
“I wonder. I think we could hold back and take our time to find out more, but it’s also possible that Wagner’s plan is to make us think that. Either way, the one who will make the final decision on how to deal with this is not up to us, but our leader, Zead.”
Just as Bosch was about to reply, Zead's voice came from the transport plane's communication system.
"It's me. We've finished handing over the Blauer Nebels, but as expected, all other requests for cooperation have been refused. The base commander wants you to leave the Dresden base immediately, and if possible, leave Germany altogether. Has there been any progress on that?"
"There has been progress. Although things have become a bit complicated."
Bosch responded in a somewhat firm tone.
"I'll tell you more about it on the plane."
"There was a reaction on the detector. He's here after all."
Hermes reported in a subdued voice. Zead responded calmly.
"I see. In that case, it makes sense that we were exploring in a transport plane when we accidentally discovered the same reaction of the Wanzer as the assault team. With this, we can visit the Blauer Nebel base without putting Bosch's friends at risk."
"However, I think the possibility of it being a trap has increased even more. It seems strange that they have kept the Wanzer hidden within the base operational until now."
Zead responded calmly to Bosch's point.
"No, you shouldn't think that. At this point, we don't know that the location where this Wanzer's reaction came from is a secret base of the German military, or that it is being used by the Blauer Nebel. We simply discovered a reaction that suggested the Wanzer that had attacked a new resource area in Poland was making repairs at the hideout, and decided to rush in. That's all there is to it."
"Certainly, the data we received from Dresden base is a top secret matter that must never be leaked anywhere. We have to act as if it never happened."
Hermes nodded, and Latona groaned in disgust.
"But I'm not impressed with you going out of your way to jump into something that's

likely to be a trap."
"That's true, but that doesn't mean we can just retreat and avoid the trap."
Zead responded with a wry smile.
"If they were going to back down now to avoid trouble, why would they have flown around to Denmark and Poland in the first place?"
"Well, I thought you'd say that."
Latona shrugged as if there was nothing she could do about it.
"Leader, this atmosphere reminds me of when I was in the British Special Forces. It's lively, which is nice, but it also feels a little dangerous."
"...In other words, the Grim Reaper Zead has been resurrected."
Zead groaned, frowning as expected.
"Understood. Let's act with caution. We must pursue results in order for Durandal to survive, but putting the lives of our members at risk would be counterproductive. We are not an army, after all."
Just as Zead spoke, as if to admonish himself, the transport plane's communication device emitted a receiving sound.
"This is the German Army. We are warning you to any unknown aircraft. The airspace you are about to enter is under special military occupation and you may not enter without prior authorization. Turn around and leave immediately."
"This is Durandal, the EC Land Tactical Research Institute. We are pursuing an armed vanguard of unknown affiliation that has attacked a new resource area in Poland."
In response to the standard warning, Zead raised his voice and spoke confidently.
"We have just detected an operational Wing Tour on the ground in the vicinity, matching the description of the armed Wing Tour in question. We will now begin an emergency search, and are requesting the cooperation of the German Army."
"What a stupid thing to say! This is a closed German Army base! There's no way such a reckless Wanzer would be here!"
Zead remained calm as he spoke to the person who had suddenly become emotional.
"However, it is true that the detector is responding. As long as we can confirm that the Wanzer is the one in question, our needs will be satisfied. We would appreciate your cooperation in the search."
"No! If you continue to violate our specially occupied airspace, we will attack!"
The person on the other end of the line yelled loudly, but Zead continued speaking in the same tone.
"If they fail to cooperate, we will unfortunately have to carry out a compulsory

investigation using the powers given to us by the European Commission. If you have any complaints, please address them directly to the European Commission."
"Don't be ridiculous! I seriously want to get shot down!"
Ignoring the person shouting, Zead looked around at the group and spoke.
"Perform an airborne landing and secure any Wanzers that are responding to the sensors. Hermes, you stay on the transport and keep an eye on them to make sure they don't escape. If they attack from the ground, increase your altitude to avoid them."
"Eh? I'm the one staying home alone?"
Bosch spoke gently to the puzzled Hermes.
“I’m not as good at piloting a plane as you are. I can only just about fly it. And to be honest, I’m not confident in assisting an airborne landing either.”
"Oh, I see. That's it."
Hermes reluctantly nodded, and Zead asked Bosch.
"Did you bring your Wanzer? If not, I'll have to use Hermes' Giza Hybrid."
"Don't worry. I brought the Tatoo prototype that was being tested in Iceland."
Saying that, Bosch chuckled slightly.
"The aiming performance of its arms is not the best, but its agility easily surpasses that of a Stoke. If it's just about dodging enemy attacks, this is the best Wanzer in the world."
"What?! The treasured possession of the Toroh Corporation, the Lightning-Speed Tattoo? They're finally willing to offer the item to Durandal!"
Hermes let out a frantic cry, but Zead immediately interrupted her.
"We can discuss that later. Right now, we need to get our operation underway."
"Is that Blauer Nebel's secret base?"
Looking out over what could only be an ancient castle towering high in the steep mountains, Zead glared at the sight, a little astonished.
"I don't know whose hobby it is, but do you think you're some medieval castle lord or knight by holding yourself up in a place like that?"
"Apparently, it's a base that was remodeled from the original Castle Aoki."
Bosch responded with a wry smile.
"I agree that they are subservient. However, it's also true that they are difficult to attack."
"There's a gun mount. It could be a machine gun, a rocket launcher, or a missile launcher. Either way, it's going to be a real pain."
Latona growled in a sulky mood, and Bosch calmly replied.

"By coincidence, there are some heat-resistant sheets in the backpack of my Wanzer. If that gun mount is a rocket launcher or a grenade launcher, it should come in handy."
"That's appreciated. Please give it to me right away."
Following Zead's instructions, Bosch took out a heat-resistant sheet from the Wanzer's backpack. When he covered the Wanzer with this, it slowed it down a little, but it became much more resistant to the rocket artillery and grenade launchers that rained flames down from above.
"But what if that gun was a machine gun or an armor-piercing gun?"
"When that happens, all you have to do is take the seat off. It takes some effort to put it on, but it takes just a moment to take it off."
Bosch answered my question as if it were a matter of course. However, I realized that even such a small thing would be thought of differently by someone who had been through the pandemonium of real combat. Even though it was just a sheet, the act of taking off equipment once put on is something that a pilot who has only experience in properly staged exercises and mock battles would hardly think of. Then, as our four Wanzers equipped with heat-resistant sheets advanced, a loud voice rang out over the loudspeaker from the direction of Kojo Base.
"Attention trespassers calling themselves Durandal. You are trespassing on the grounds of a secret German Army base. If you do not leave immediately, we will remove you by force."
"Is this voice Wagner?"
Bosch groaned softly, and Zead responded through the external loudspeaker.
"With the authority granted to us by the EC Parliament, we at Durandal are pursuing an armed Wanzer of unknown affiliation that has attacked a new resource-rich area in Poland. We are not sure how this happened, but we have detected an operational Wanzer within your base that matches the armed Wanzer in question. In order to solve this mysterious phenomenon, we will enter your base and identify the Wanzer in question. We would like the German Army to cooperate as soon as possible."
"Enough with your nonsense. The thing you were ordered to investigate by the EC Council was the German military base attack. I don't know what happened in Poland, but are you trying to justify trespassing by arbitrarily expanding your authority? I'll let you off the hook for now. Get out of here!"
The voice that seemed to be Major Wagner's was cold and merciless, but Zead was not giving up.
"We just want to confirm the strange reaction of the Wanzers. If you have done

nothing wrong, why are you so determined to hide it? You told us before that you have done nothing wrong and that you would rather have a public settlement, and that if you are dissatisfied with how we have handled the situation, we have no problem taking your case to the EC summit or the British Prime Minister. Now, I will return the same words to you. If you are dissatisfied with our investigation, we have no problem taking your case to the EC summit or the German Chancellor. We have done nothing wrong and we would rather have a public settlement. However, we will do whatever it takes to confirm the Wanzers that are reacting the same way as the assault force."
"Appealing to force, you say? After you were lucky enough to defeat Dranz's patrol, you're a group of amateurs and dropouts who think you can force us, Blauer Nebel, into submission!"
Suddenly Wagner's voice took on a hot tone of indignation.
"Then let's have a duel based on your abilities. If you want to check out this strangely reacting Wanzer thing, you'll have to rush over to where it is. Of course, I won't show you any mercy."
"...It's unfortunate that we couldn't get your cooperation."
I replied sarcastically, and then Zead commanded us.
"All aircraft, charge!"
"Fools!"
As if in response to Wagner's jeer, the guns at the old castle base began firing. The shells were fired at a high angle, bursting in the air and raining flames over a wide area. It was a grenade launcher.
"Wow!"
No matter how agile the Stokes and Tatoos are, it's impossible for them to avoid the flame attacks of the grenade cannon that rain down over a wide area. Even though they have some protection from the heat-resistant sheets, they can't avoid damage when flames are relentlessly showered from above. However, we can't just scatter recklessly just because we're afraid of the grenade cannon. At the very least, Latona and my Wanzers' combat power will be greatly reduced if they are not within range to maintain link. And from up ahead, several Blauer Nebel Wanzers are swarming out to intercept.
"Let's make this a melee! If allies and enemies are mixed together, the grenade launcher will be useless!"
Giving orders, Latona charged into the enemy ranks. Naturally, I immediately followed suit. The Blauer Nebel Wanzers all fired their machine guns at once, but

Latona's machine gun moved brilliantly to avoid most of them, and what she couldn't avoid, she blocked with the shield on her right arm. Once we closed the distance, the enemy couldn't fire easily, as there was a risk of friendly fire. Of course, there was still the possibility that the enemy would be like Dranz, a notoriously ruthless Blauer Nebel, and would shoot at their allies without a second thought, so we couldn't let our guard down, but in fact, the number of hits we took in close combat had visibly decreased. On the other hand, if I left it to the automatic firing of the link system, there was absolutely no way that I would fire at Latona's machine. Zead's and Bosch's machines were a little further back, so there was almost no need to worry about friendly fire. With a bang, Latona's unit slammed its pile bunker into the enemy unit, while at the same time my Wanzer automatically fired its shotgun. The corridors of the Kojo base were extremely narrow by common standards for a military base that uses Wanzers, barely wide enough for two Wanzers to pass each other. Normally, the defenders have the advantage in a place like this, but this time, the invaders were in the minority, and Latona, who boasts invincible strength in close combat, was leading the charge. The Blauer Nebel side also sent out several Wanzers equipped with melee weapons, but far from taking down Latona's unit, they were unable to even stop its advance, and were thwarted by a hail of bullets from my unit following behind.
"If we keep going like this, we might be able to get inside the base pretty quickly..."
I fainted as I stepped over the disabled Wanzers, following Latona's, whose pilots had escaped. If we could enter the base, it would be even more difficult for the defenders to use gunfire and explosives, giving the invaders an advantage. There was a possibility that traps had been set inside the base, but even a Wagner like melee weapon wouldn't be able to use a trap with enough destructive power to blow up our own base. Just as I was thinking this, a Wanzer equipped with a melee weapon leapt out of the narrow passage to the side and attacked Latona. However, Latona dodged it easily, and instead smashed its pile bunker into its torso. At the same time, my unit fired a shotgun with Link's automatic attack, easily stalling the new Wanzer and ejecting its pilot. But at that moment, a scream-like voice from Hermes came from the headset.
"They've stopped responding! The Wanzers assault team has suddenly stopped responding!"
"Didn't it just stop working?"
Hermes, who was in the transport plane overhead, quickly answered Zead's question.
"No, if it was detecting it at this distance, even if it was simply stopped operating,

there should have been a weak reaction for a while it was idling! This sudden loss of reaction can only be interpreted as the Wanzer itself being destroyed!"
"......broke?"
I hear Latona's dazzling eyes. Perhaps, at that moment, she and I were looking at the same thing. The fallen Wanzer that we had just derailed.
"I just destroyed one of the attacking Wanzers, but that was a Blauer Nebel Wanzer. It wasn't one of the assault forces."
"...So you fell for the deception?"
Bosch glared slightly, but then Zead issued an order in a firm voice.
"That may be so, but it may not be. We are doing surprisingly well, so it's possible that Wagner got anxious and disposed of the Wanzers inside the base. We will continue the forced investigation until we can confirm this. However, we need to secure the remains of the Wanzers we just defeated just to be safe."
"I'll take that role. Latona, Elsa, and the leader, please continue to charge into the base."
Bosch responded immediately, but before Zead could reply, a communication that sounded like a forced interrupt came over the headset.
"To all our soldiers and foreign troops calling themselves Durandal, cease hostilities immediately! We are the German Military Police! If you do not cease hostilities, we will consider you hostile to us and to all German troops, regardless of which side you are on! I repeat! To all our soldiers and foreign troops calling themselves Durandal, cease hostilities immediately..."
"The Military Police are intervening. That was unexpectedly quick."
Sewing through the angry shouts of the forced interrupt communication, Zead coughed calmly.
"In that case, either way, the fight against Blauer Nebel will have to wait."
"...Who won?"
Hermes asked with a sigh, to which Zead replied with a wry smile.
"Since neither of them managed to knock the other out, the time limit was reached. Ask the referee what the decision will be."
"...the referee, I see."
Latona was dazzled and her Wanzer's eye camera was pointed upwards. In the sky, more than ten armed helicopters were in formation, preparing to descend to the ground.

MISSION 6:
Restart

"In the end, both sides were punished..."
I sighed and dazed as I looked at the official notice from the EC Congress displayed on the monitor screen. In the end, at the Blauer Nebel base, we found no trace of the Wanzers that had attacked the new resource area in Poland, or any remnants of them. The German Army Gendarmerie thoroughly searched every section of the base, with us present, but there was no sign of any Wanzers having been disposed of, other than the ones we had destroyed when we entered. This raised strong suspicions that the Wanzers we had destroyed just before the Gendarmerie arrived were camouflaged machines whose operating patterns resembled those of the assault force's aircraft, but in the end, in order to prevent Wanzers that were rendered inoperable from falling into the hands of enemy forces and stealing secrets, they were designed to automatically erase all data. No matter how many aircraft remained, it would be nearly impossible to trace back to see if they had been transmitting camouflage patterns. Thus, the only evidence that there was a Wanzer emitting a suspicious operating pattern at the Blauer Nebel base was the sensor data remaining on our transport plane. And because data can be fabricated at any time, it cannot be used as objective evidence. Naturally, the German government vehemently criticized Durandal at the EC parliament, arguing that such a lawless armed organization should be disbanded immediately. However, the Polish government, which was previously supposed to be pro-German, began to directly criticize Blauer Nebel, saying that it was suspected that Blauer Nebel had intentionally let the troops that attacked the new Polish resource area escape, causing a great turmoil in the parliament. For the time being, it was decided that the attack on the new Polish resource area would be investigated by the Polish military separately from the attack on the German military base, and that the German government and military would fully cooperate in clarifying the facts, and that the punishment for Durandal and Blauer Nebel would be discussed again after the facts were clarified. So, although Durandal will not be punished for the time being, the order to investigate the German military base attack was revoked as it was deemed inappropriate under the circumstances, and he was not given the authority to investigate the attack on the new resource area in Poland. In short, if Durandal gets involved, the situation will become complicated, so he should back off. Meanwhile, the German government was forced to transfer the investigation into the German military base attack from the suspected Blauer Nebel to a joint special investigation organization of the German Army, Navy, and Air Force Gendarmerie. It seems that the Blauer Nebel was supposed to be investigating near the Kiel naval base that was attacked, but in fact,

the commander, Major Wagner, and most of his forces were in an undisclosed castle base and near the Polish border, and it seems that suspicions are being raised not only from the Polish government and military, but also from the German Army Gendarmerie, who are supposed to be on their side, as to why they were in such a place. However, the real intention of the EC Council seems to be that, regardless of the truth of the situation, it would be troublesome for Germany and Poland to be at odds with each other in the emergency when the USN fleet is about to enter the Atlantic. Even if the German military's inland base is attacked, it does not have much effect on the EC's own defense power, and the attack on the new Polish resource area is a serious matter for the EC as a whole in the long run, but as long as there are stockpiles of resources, it does not mean that the EC military will be unable to move right now. On the other hand, the USN fleet eyeing the Iberia Megafloat and Madeira Island is an urgent and major threat that is looming before our eyes. The EC Congress was convened on an emergency basis primarily to make the necessary decisions to mobilize the EC combined fleet against the USN fleet, and it appears that they have no intention of taking any further action regarding the two attacks than to await local investigations.
"I understand that the USN fleet is scary, but can we really wage war with armed Wanzer units infiltrating EC space?"
"The USN government must have thought the same, and therefore saw this as an opportune moment to send out their fleet. And what kind of absurd reason for starting a war is there to get angry and send in combat troops just because the German government issued a mere statement of condemnation? Seriously, if the true identity of the raiding force was the USN military, then it was an unforgivable, heinous act of aggression, but if not, then it was nothing but a despicable act of thieving in an emergency."
Hermes growled in genuine annoyance.
"If the USN fleet really attacks the Iberia Megafloat or Madeira, I will seriously abandon the USN and defect to the EC. Although, I don't know if they will accept my defection easily."
"I hope that doesn't happen, but if it does, I believe that Zead will do everything in his power to support you in receiving asylum. Of course, I don't know what I can do either, but I will definitely do what I can."
When I told her, Hermes suddenly broke into a shy smile.
"Thank you. I'm glad to hear that."
The small, dazzling Hermes scratched her head, perhaps to hide her embarrassment,

and continued speaking quickly.
"Well, in order to be accepted as an asylum seeker, I first need to prove to the EC that I am a valuable asset. To do that, I need to work hard with Durandal and achieve great things."
"What kind of work are you doing now? If there's anything I can help you with, I'd like to help out and learn at the same time."
"Well, Zead took his vacation early, so I've got nothing to do and I'm bored," I added silently. Immediately after the notice came from the EC parliament that the order to investigate the German military base attack was revoked, Zead said with a wry smile that it might be best to cool his head for a bit, then took his vacation and disappeared somewhere. As a result, I don't have any work to do for the time being. Hermes responded by tilting her head slightly.
"That's right. As a result of this recent incident, various companies have started delivering high-performance Wanzers to Durandal that they had been holding back on until now. Right now we are in the process of checking the data, but by tomorrow we will be able to actually use several of the units, so I think we will have Elsa pilot them and report back on how they feel."
"Eh? Is Durandal being evaluated highly by companies because of this incident?"
When I asked in surprise, Hermes explained with a proud smile.
"Of course. They fought against the Blauer Nebels, known as the most elite of the German military, and despite being clearly outnumbered, they completely defeated the patrol and almost managed to invade the base. Up until now, the entrepreneurs had thought of Durandal as nothing more than a group of free test pilots, but now that it is this strong in actual combat, they must have decided that being recognized there would add credibility to their company's Wanzers."
"Oh, is that so..."
When Zead disappeared, I thought the whole thing had been a complete waste of time, but it had had an effect, and I was dazzled. I'm not in a position of responsibility like Zead, but even a low-ranking rookie like me would be a little disappointed if the first operation I participated in as a member of Durandal ended up being a complete failure. Even if we didn't achieve our original goal, the fact that it had had some positive effect was quite good news. However, Hermes suddenly frowned again and continued speaking.
"However, there's something that bothers me a bit. We've been inundated with offers to deliver test Wanzers from companies that had no prior relationship with Durandal, but not a single one has come from a German company. The exception is Schnecke,

which has been supplying us with new Zeder-type heavy Wanzers, but they've had a relationship with Durandal for some time, and although their headquarters are in Germany, they're actually an international company. In reality, you'd think we'd see more movement from other German companies trying to outdo Schnecke."
"Isn't that because you're afraid of the German army and government?"
Hermes shook her head at my remark.
"No, the vast majority of the official German military wanzers, including the ones used by Blauer Nebels, are manufactured by Schnecke. I can understand if Schnecke, which already has the upper hand, acts cautiously, but there's no point in other companies being timid. That's right, if there's anything they should be hesitant to do, it's probably because they're sharing some kind of shady secret that could affect the very survival of the company. Just like Sakata Industries."
"It's a shady, secret..."
I tried to repeat Hermes' words in a low voice. It certainly seemed like the German government was still hiding something. Just then, Latona came into the central control room and called out to me.
"Elsa, if you have time, would you mind helping me break in the Wanzer? I've decided to switch from Stoke to Tatoo, so I want to get it running and adjust it."
"Sure."
When I stood up, Hermes clapped his hands.
"That's right. While we're at it, wouldn't it be better to give Elsa's Wanzer a new one and give it some adjustments? If you give us about 30 minutes, we can replace Tatoo's arms with Cicada IIs and improve the accuracy of her gunfire, and then we can get Elsa's hybrid Wanzer up and running. Of course, we'll also re-link it."
"Thirty minutes. Okay, let's wait."
Before I could reply, Latona responded, and then she continued to tell me.
"Well, let's take a break until Hermes prepares the Wanzer. Want to grab some tea in the break room?"
"Yes, I'll go with you."
When I nodded, Hermes spoke lightly.
"You two can relax and chat in the break room. I'll contact you once I've finished arranging the Wanzer."
"Thank you. Well then, I look forward to working with you."
I gave Hermes a smile and left the central control room with Latona. And as soon as we stepped into the corridor, she glared at me with a difficult expression.
"If relations between the EC and the USN deteriorate, it will be difficult for Hermes. I

hope we can somehow protect them with Durandal."
"That's right. He himself says that if push comes to shove, he'll defect to the EC."
When I responded, Latona tilted her head with her brows knitted.
"My uncle is a high-ranking USN government official, after all. It's not going to be that easy. No matter how much he tries to act like it's nothing to do with him, the world will always see it through political eyes."
"I suppose so. But no matter what people say, I want to do everything I can for him, and I will."
I say and she nods with a small laugh.
"Yeah, me too. Hermes is an indispensable member of Durandal, and he's quite a nice guy."
As she said this, Latona's expression suddenly tightened.
"Oh? There's a stranger here. He doesn't seem to be a contractor or someone from a munitions company. Who could he be?"
"picture?"
I turned my eyes in the direction she was looking and couldn't help but gasp.
"That's Frederick Lancaster! Why is he at Durandal Headquarters?"
"What?"
The moment Latona heard Lancaster's name, her expression suddenly became grim.
Then, it seemed he noticed, and he turned his face towards us. For a moment, I thought he would just leave, but he walked straight towards me.
"Hey, you were with Lt. Colonel Elger in Paris, weren't you? Isn't he at HQ right now?"
"What can I do for you, Leader? If this is an official interview, you need prior permission from the EC Council Secretariat."
I said as calmly as possible, but Lancaster just grinned and shook his head.
"No, this is not something that can be done leisurely through official channels. I have come across some very interesting information regarding the recent series of attacks on Germany and Poland, and I would like to hear your opinion on it, Lieutenant Colonel Elger. Well, if the Lieutenant Colonel is not available, any of the Durandal members involved in the incident would be fine, but could we exchange information?"
"I have no information to tell you, and I have no interest in hearing yours."
Latona responded brusquely.
"If this isn't an official interview, Durandal HQ is not the right place for a whistle-blower like you to infiltrate. If you don't disappear quickly, I'll have you dragged out with a knife."
"Well, don't be so cocky, Lieutenant Vasilev."

With a wry smile, Lancaster turned to Latona and waved one hand.
"It's true that I'm the man who exposes Zaftra's conspiracies, but you have nothing to do with the conspiracies of your homeland, either before or now, right?"
"picture?"
I was taken aback by Lancaster's words for a moment, not knowing that Latona was from Zaftra, but then Latona herself suddenly turned enraged and shouted, looking like a wild beast.
"What do you mean by this conspiracy? Are you saying that the successive attacks on Germany and Poland were the work of the Zaftra army?"
"Yes, that's right."
Lancaster responded calmly.
"At least, that's what I've concluded based on the information I have. That's why I'd like to hear the opinions of the Durandal members who are actually fighting the assault force, but given the nature of the content, we can't just have a chat in the hallway."
Lancaster said, shrugging lightly.
"If you're interested in hearing what I have to say, why don't you come to the store called 'Ritter's' in front of the headquarters? My friends are checking there to make sure no strange people or devices get in, so for now it's safe. Of course, I'm not forcing you to come."
"......"
Latona glared at Lancaster with an indignant look on her face, but she remained silent, without telling him not to go to such a place or to get out of there. I hesitated for a moment, but then I remembered the words of Gide I had heard in Paris.
"Zead said that if the case became politically difficult, he might have no choice but to make a deal with Lancaster and use his intelligence network. If Zead were here today, he probably wouldn't turn down Lancaster without listening to him."
I was silently dazzled, I told Lancaster.
"Okay. I'll go and talk to you. I can't guarantee, though, that I have any information that will be of use to you."
"OK, deal done."
Lancaster responded with a grin, while Latona interjected with a look of genuine displeasure.
"I can't let just one new recruit go. It's annoying, but I'll go too."
Without further ado, she took out her portable communicator and began communicating.

"It's Hermes Latona. Frederick Lancaster has infiltrated the headquarters... Yes, it's the same Lancaster who exposed the Sakata Industries incident. He seems to have come to sell information to Zead, but Elsa received the information instead. As things turned out, I was also there and we went to a store called 'Ritter's' to hear what he had to say... Ah, the 'Ritter's' in front of the headquarters. Apparently, Lancaster's associates are checking for suspicious people and wiretaps, so it's safe to talk there... No! Zead is away, so you have to stay at the headquarters! You're the second manager after all! I'll tell you what I said when I get back, so make sure you make the arrangements for the Wanzer! That's all!"
With a final yell, Latona abruptly switched off her handset and glared at Lancaster.
"Well then, let's go."
"Let me get straight to the point. What is your basis for saying that the attacking force was not a USN special forces unit, nor an OCU mercenary, nor a German plot, but a Zaftras unit?"
As soon as he sat down in the box seats at the bar "Ritter's," Latona confronted Lancaster in a tone that sounded like she was about to bite him. Lancaster responded simply.
"It's a pipeline. As you know, within Zaftra, there are many high-speed pipelines running for the efficient transport of goods, and some even extend outside the country. One of them, the line connecting Kursk in Zaftra and Bassau in Germany, was supposedly abolished when the EC stopped importing resources from Zaftra, but in fact, it has been secretly used up to this day."
"Whatever!"
Latona's face suddenly turns pale.
"So the raiders entered Germany not by sea, air or road, but by pipeline?"
"Yes. If it was a pipeline that was officially in use, naturally there would be customs checks at the entrance and exit, but since it's officially been abolished, there are absolutely no checks on it. As long as Germany and Zaftra are in league with each other, they can invade and retreat at will, no matter how wary the surrounding countries are."
Lancaster said, shrugging.
"Actually, I had been investigating the secret agreement between Zaftra and Germany even before this incident occurred. It seems that the German government has been using a pipeline to send goods to Zaftra for quite some time, without the other EC countries finding out. It seems that quite a few German companies are illegally benefiting from this. Of course, the majority of the German people are

unaware of this, and it's not likely that all those connected to the German government and military are keeping quiet about it, but even so, if it were to come to light, it would undoubtedly become a major scandal."
"So that's why you did something so crazy..."
Latona, now pale, groaned softly, then suddenly looked puzzled and asked,
"But if that's the case, does that mean that the main conspiracy was Germany, and that Zaftra acted on their request?"
"Maybe that was the case at first. But the attack on the new resource area in Poland was clearly a plan led by Zaftra. If that area goes bust, they won't have to smuggle it to Germany, and they'll be able to sell the resources to the EC at a high price. It's a perfect situation for Zaftra."
After he said it bluntly, Lancaster continued speaking calmly.
"Fortunately, with your help from Durandal, Poland's new resource areas were spared from annihilation. At least for now, there are no growing voices within the EC calling for the need to import resources from outside. And since the Polish military is using all its strength to defend the new resource areas, a second attack will be difficult. So what is Zaftra thinking? I hope the EC runs out of resources. In other words, the USN and the EC will enter into a full-scale war of attrition."
"So, is it Zaftra who is stirring up tensions between the EC and the USN?"
I ask, and Lancaster nods curtly.
"Exactly. However, I believe that the manipulation in this regard is mainly being carried out by the USN. I think it was called the Madeira Free Independence Council, a private Madeira island independence movement group, which was probably easy to manipulate, and now most of its executives are Zaftra's minions. Other than that, the USN parliament and the anti-EC hardliners in the military, I won't say all of them, but a considerable number of them seem to have the backing of Zaftra."
"Is that so? Aren't a lot of ZAFTRA undercover agents in the USN political and military circles exposed during the Sakata Industries incident?"
Latona said bitterly, and Lancaster shook his head.
"Most of them are just cutting off the tail of a lizard. The majority of those arrested were personnel who were trained and sent out by Zaftra and were treated as expendable. The real bigwigs have been living in other countries for generations, completely immersed in other nationalities and leaving no evidence behind. They remain advisors to the rulers as politicians, bureaucrats, high-ranking military personnel, or scholars, and continue to exert their influence. It is virtually impossible to arrest such people unless documents are produced by Zaftra's side."

Lancaster chuckled when he said that.
"By the way, the EC hasn't even cut off the tail of the lizard, so it's not surprising that there are ZAFTRA infiltrators all over the place. Specifically, it's possible that Blauer Nebel's commander, Brigadier General Glaser, and its commander, Major Wagner, are both ZAFTRA infiltrators. Furthermore, the current Chancellor of Germany may be one too."
"The German Chancellor?"
Lancaster nodded slightly as I looked at him with wide eyes.
"Yes, the possibility is not small. Although this is not limited to Zaftra, not all infiltrators will necessarily remain loyal to their home country forever. Especially if they become socially successful in the country they infiltrate into, or if their relatives change and no longer live in their home country."
"Hmm"
Latona snorted in displeasure, as if she had remembered something. Then Lancaster continued speaking.
"I've gone off topic a bit, but while ZAFTRA is encouraging the USN to wage war against the EC, it seems they are secretly supporting the Venezuelan independence struggle. Have you heard the news that the governor of a USN Venezuelan state suddenly declared independence?"
"Yeah, sort of. But it wasn't treated as a big deal."
I was a little hesitant, but I answered. After all, the EC press was naturally focused on the serial attacks in Germany and Poland at the moment, and wasn't showing much interest in an incident that had taken place in faraway South America. Lancaster gave a wry smile and shook his head.
"The weakness of the mass media is that they get distracted by big events close to home and can't see anything else. But a real journalist can read important omens from small, distant events. For now, the Venezuelan independence conflict is being treated as just another of the many violent incidents occurring in South America, not only by the EC, but even by the local USN. The USN government has decided that they can put it down quickly by sending in the regular army's vanguard, and there are very few people, not even the hardliners, but even the cautious ones, who think that it could be an obstacle to the war against the EC. However, I have received top secret information that suggests that a group that appears to be a special forces unit from Zaftra is cooperating with the Venezuelan governor who declared independence. If this information is true, the USN military may suffer an unexpected bitter defeat in Venezuela."

"However, if the USN military finds itself in a difficult situation in South America, it will be to the EC's advantage. If ZAFTRA is plotting to make the USN and the EC go to war, won't that be counterproductive?"
At Latona's comment, Lancaster gave a flirtatious smile.
"I think that Zaftra is taking out an insurance policy. It would be troublesome if they encouraged the hardliners too much and the USN were to unilaterally defeat the EC. So they need to be prepared to trip them up when the time comes. Well, maybe the EC is just a decoy, and Zaftra's real intention is to take Venezuela from the USN and drive a wedge into South America. But either way, Zaftra is trying to use the EC to their advantage. That's the information I got and the inferences I've based on it. What do you think?"
"It's infuriating, but it's convincing."
Latona growled, sounding genuinely annoyed.
"However, the fundamental premise of that inference rests on the covert operation of an abandoned pipeline between Kursk and Bassau. Without that, Zaftra's suspicions are no less than those of the USN."
"That's right. I completely trust the person who provided me with this information, but I can't reveal who it is, and I can't ask you to trust me without telling you who the information came from. However, I just wanted to verify whether the members of Durandal who actually came into contact with and engaged in combat with the assault force would refute the strangeness of this theory. If I can get Lieutenant Vasilev, of all people, to say that it's convincing, then that will be enough."
Lancaster replied with a grin, and Latona's expression became even more sour. I then asked Lancaster,
"So, is this the end of the story?"
"That's right. What you decide to do after listening to what I have to say is none of my business for the time being."
Saying this, Lancaster waves one hand as if to brush something away.
"Well, if I were you, I would fly to Bassau first and foremost to find out the truth. However, not everyone can afford to do something so reckless. Your investigative authority seems to have been revoked, and if you enter Germany without permission in the current situation, you may be shot down without question. Besides, with Lieutenant Colonel Elger not there, it would be impossible to make any moves."
"But would you still fly there?"
Lancaster responded immediately to my question.
"Yeah, I'll jump in. If I can't trust the information provided by others, I'll check it out

with my own eyes first before I start nitpicking. That's the way I've always worked."
"So they used a pipeline that was officially decommissioned to send a Wanzer team across EC territory? I'm sure that's something I couldn't have imagined."
After I told him the information I had received from Frederick Lancaster, Hermes put his hand to his brow and groaned in frustration.
"The moment I realized the German government might be involved, I should have realized."
"No, that's impossible."
Bosch, who had come to the central control room, responded with a wry smile.
"Now that we have this information, it's only circumstantial evidence, but we received a coded message from a comrade at the Dresden base. After that, they took the time to collate the detailed data, and apparently succeeded in identifying a trailer that was thought to have been carrying a Wanzer that had infiltrated from the Polish border. They then said that the trailer did not head for the Furushiro base, but instead traveled south and out of the radar range."
"South...Bassau is south of Dresden."
I glared and Bosch nodded.
"Exactly. Moreover, this trailer has had the audacity to cross the border from Germany into the Czech Republic, so we can't track it any further."
"Indeed, to get from Dresden to Bassau, it would be shorter to cut through the Czech Republic and head south. That's quite a bold idea."
When Hermes groaned, Latona calmly pointed out.
"No, if we go around Germany, the route will take us west and pass close to the Furushiro base. In that case, there's no point in sending a dummy to the Furushiro base. That's probably Wagner's instruction."
"Oh, I see...wait a minute."
Suddenly, Hermes looked as if she had remembered something, and immediately went to the monitor, pulled up the data and began comparing it.
"Ah, that's right. I was just talking to Elsa about this earlier, but after the recent incident, all the Wanzer-related military companies that have bases within EC territory have been competing to contact Durandal. However, among them, for some reason, there are a few German companies that we haven't heard from at all. So, when I checked just now, it seems as if they had agreed to do so, but they all have factories and warehouses in Bassau or the surrounding area."
"So you're an accomplice to pipeline smuggling?"
Latona declared bluntly, and Hermes nodded gravely.

"Probably. But this is just circumstantial evidence."
"In the end, I don't think we'll get the truth unless we go to Bassau."
Latona tells me with a serious look on her face, dazzled by the sight.
"However, Durandal no longer has investigative authority. As that journalist said, if you even try to enter German territory, you will be turned away, or worse, shot."
"Yes, but Frederick Lancaster said he would go anyway. I'm no reporter, of course, but I want to get to the truth."
Under my dazzling light, Latona, Bosch, and Hermes all looked at each other with complicated expressions. If you think about it, Latona is from Zaftra, the new mastermind, Bosch is from Germany, the exact location of the incident, and Hermes is from the USN, who seems to have been falsely accused and is being manipulated just like the EC. They all must have complicated feelings, so they probably can't just say they want to get to the truth as straightforwardly as I do.
"Either way, without Zead there's nothing we can do."
Bosch looked at Hermes, dazed and confused.
"Can't you get in touch with him?"
"Yeah, Zead turns off his mobile phone when he's on vacation. It's not like he has a way to make an emergency call..."
As Hermes spoke hesitantly, I asked him directly.
How can I make an emergency call?
"...call Deputy Secretary Allison."
In response to Hermes' answer, Latona, Bosch, and I all looked at each other.
"What does that mean, Umari? What is your relationship like?"
"Don't ask me about that. I'm sure that when Zead was still in the British military, Undersecretary Allison was a special forces officer in the Public Security Bureau or the Foreign Ministry or something, so I think it might be a remnant of that. Anyway, if you really want to get in touch with Zead while he's on vacation, you have no choice but to ask Undersecretary Allison to put you through."
Hermes responded with a troubled look on her face.
"And Assistant Secretary Allison asks exactly what business Zead is being summoned for, and if she judges it to be inappropriate, she stubbornly refuses to put him through. To be honest, I don't really like her."
"Okay. I'll ask the Undersecretary."
Saying that, I stared intently at Hermes.
"So, please tell me Deputy Secretary Allison's contact information."
"You have received new information and would like to pass it on to Zead. Is it

information that requires urgent action?"
I answered Deputy Secretary Allison's question frankly.
"I don't know. It may be urgent, or Zead may decide that there's no problem if we leave it alone. To be honest, I'd like to await Zead's judgement on that point as well."
"Right. Well, first of all, please tell me that information. This line has been completely sealed off, so there's no need to worry about it leaking out."
I hesitated for a moment when Undersecretary Allison told me as if it was a matter of course, but then I immediately told him the information I had received from Frederick Lancaster about the pipeline. Even the Undersecretary seemed surprised by this, and after being speechless for a moment, he shouted.
"A supposedly abandoned pipeline from Germany to the Zaftra is being secretly used? That would make the EC customs agreement, the external trade restrictions and the emergency closure of the territorial borders all meaningless!"
"Yes, it is a very serious matter."
I told the Deputy Secretary, trying to sound as calm as possible.
"For that reason alone, I believe the German side will try very hard to conceal the truth, and we cannot make accusations lightly based on the testimony of a mere journalist. I believe we have no choice but to obtain evidence with our own hands."
"But that's not something you Durandal should be doing. At the very least, since your investigative authority has been revoked, you shouldn't be so careless as to interfere. I'll try to do some groundwork in the EC parliament and get an investigation order issued against you again, so don't move until then!"
Deputy Secretary Allison's words were sincere, but I responded in a calm tone.
"Right now, the EC Congress is busy dealing with the USN fleet, isn't it? At a time like that, I don't think they can make a resolution that will stir up the situation, such as reissuing the investigation order that was once revoked. And if Frederick Lancaster's speculation is correct, ZAFTRA is trying to provoke both the EC and the USN and bring them into a full-scale state of war. Think about it. If we are in a state of war, whoever it is, can we expose the pipeline smuggling between Germany and ZAFTRA? On the contrary, won't the EC have no choice but to collude with the USN, even if it means turning a blind eye to the criminal acts of Germany and ZAFTRA?"
"...That may be true."
Deputy Secretary Allison responded, sounding tired.
"Furthermore, Frederick Lancaster knows that Germany and Zaftra are plotting something. In the worst case scenario, if we fail to stop the war with the USN and the entire EC is torn to shreds, and it is revealed that the war was a conspiracy by Zaftra

and that the EC and the USN were completely framed, then the EC leaders and those of us involved will be ranked lower than miserable clowns."
"If that happens, then naturally Durandal will not be able to survive."
In truth, I thought that the soldiers who died in wars that were hatched by conspiracies, the families who lost their loved ones, and the ordinary citizens whose homes and property were burned were far more miserable and pitiful than the leaders, politicians, and high-ranking bureaucrats, but I didn't say that and continued speaking.
"That's why I want to abide by Zead's judgement. So that whatever the outcome, neither of us will have any regrets."
When I spoke, Deputy Director Allison paused for a moment before answering.
"I understand. I'll contact Zead and explain the situation. But it's up to him to make a decision."
"Yes, of course. I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but please, I'd appreciate it."
"Hello. Frederick Lancaster has some incredible information to share with you."
It was roughly two and a half hours after contacting Deputy Secretary Allison that Zead appeared in the central control room.
"So the pipeline connecting Kursk and Bassau was literally a loophole. Now that you mention it, it seems such a simple trick that I wonder why no one had noticed it before."
"Well, it seems that the German government and Blauer Nebel were also trying desperately to avoid being noticed."
Bosch responded with a wry smile.
"I got in touch with that comrade and asked him to look into the Bassau pipeline. It's quite far from the city of Bassau, and when the pipeline was in use, there was a customs office and a cargo loading terminal here, but now it's been abandoned and is an unmanned facility. However, no one has confirmed whether it's really unmanned or not. Also, between the city of Bassau and the Pipeline, there is an undisclosed German army base. It's not an elaborate one like an old castle base, but it seems to be just an ordinary base, and it's used by Blauer Nebel."
"I thought so"
Hermes nodded with an expression that said "As expected," and then, in her typical fashion, Latona asked Zead bluntly.
"So, are we going to go to Bassau after all to see if the pipeline is really operational? Durandal no longer has any investigative authority."
"I intend to go. But I cannot and will not force you to come with me."

It seems that he had already made up his mind by the time he arrived at HQ, as Zead responded calmly and without hesitation.
"I'll also let everyone else know that I am going to Bassau to ascertain the identity and background of the unit that attacked German military bases, new resource areas in Poland, and the Kiel naval port. This is not an official investigation, nor has it been commissioned by anyone. It's a completely private matter. I will not receive support from anywhere. And because I think the German government will probably not allow me to enter the country, I will be crossing the border by plane without asking permission. This is a completely illegal act. Even if I were able to identify the identity of the attacking unit in Bassau and uncover the truth, even if you do, you will not be able to escape responsibility for your illegal actions. Furthermore, this is not an organized action by Durandal, so if you accompany me, each of you will be held responsible for your own actions. You will not be exempt from responsibility just because you followed my orders. Since you are not soldiers, you will not be court-martialed, but at worst, you could be considered armed terrorists hostile to the German government. If that happens, the maximum penalty is the death penalty. Of course, if we engage in combat with the likes of Blauer Nebel, there is no guarantee of survival. I want you to understand that before you decide whether or not you want to accompany me."
"I'll accompany you."
As soon as Zead finished speaking, I immediately expressed my intention.
"After all, I even had to go to the trouble of Deputy Secretary Allison to give the information to Zead, who was on vacation. There's no way I'm going to say I'm not going after all that."
"I'll accompany you. I'm already angry enough that the USN is likely to be negatively affected by the EC's lawless hustle, but the fact that it's actually a foolish plan being manipulated by others is just a ridiculous story. I can't just sit back and watch. Whether the mastermind is Zaftra, Germany, or Blauer Nebel, I'll do everything in my power to stop it."
Hermes spoke in an indignant tone, while Bosch spoke calmly in contrast.

"Well, I'm in a position where it's most of my business. For better or worse, the fate of my country is at stake, so surely I can't just sit back and watch. And whatever predicament I may find myself in, if I'm willing to jump into it knowing it's a predicament, then it's far better than the hellish situation on Huffman Island where I was sent without knowing anything about it."
"That being said, it's not just my problem. Besides, there are things I need to apologize to everyone for."
Finally, Latona speaks in a brusque tone.
"Actually, I know a little about the Zaftra special forces. They believe that they are the top elites of the military, but in my opinion, they are nothing more than the military's pitiful slaves, or mere expendables. As proof of this, they have been thoroughly trained in extreme ways, such as committing suicide rather than being captured and humiliated, and they do not value their own lives. That's why there are so many deaths during training, let alone during operations. If they were really trained to be the top elites, letting them die like that would be a huge waste, but the military has still not tried to change its educational policy that disregards the lives of themselves and others, and its dangerous training methods. At least, when I left the Zaftra military - years ago, nothing had changed. No, if anything, it may have changed for the worse, in a harsher direction."
Saying that, Latona sighed deeply.
"Even though it's just now, I feel it's selfish and cowardly to say this, but when I heard that the German base raiding force not only carried out their annihilation operation mercilessly, but also committed suicide without hesitation along with the pilot when their own Wanzer was damaged to the point of being inoperable, it immediately reminded me of the Zaftra special forces. When I heard that the small support Wanzer that Leader and Elsa destroyed in Denmark seemed to be made by Zaftra, my bad feeling only grew stronger. In the Zaftra military, even the self-proclaimed elite special forces members hardly receive any training in handling weapons not made in their own country, especially Wanzers. That's why, even if there's a possibility that their true identities will be exposed, they have no choice but to use domestically made units when it comes to the Wanzer itself."
"I see, that's how it is."
Zead nodded with an understanding look.
"In my opinion, it's common knowledge that special forces can use weapons from any country, and it seems that they assumed that they would avoid using weapons made in their own country whenever possible, especially when conducting infiltration

operations where they must conceal their identities. Because of this, I concluded that if they were using Zaftra Wanzers, it was probably not the Zaftra military. However, Latona, you have no obligation to say such a thing yourself. Zaftra is not the only country that teaches special forces personnel who infiltrate other countries to carry out sabotage operations to choose death over being captured, and intuition without objective evidence can sometimes lead to misjudgment. Besides, you weren't originally in charge of this case."
"That may be so. But he should have at least confessed to his leader that he suspected the raiding force was the Zaftra army when the battle took place in Poland. If he had done that, he might have been able to focus on the line connecting Germany and Zaftra while he still had the authority to investigate, without Lancaster pointing it out."
Shaking her head from side to side, Latona spoke in a heavy tone, dazzling.
"In the end, I didn't want to acknowledge the possibility that my home country, Zaftra, was plotting against the EC and sending in special forces to carry out brutal massacres. I didn't have the courage to face the truth, nor did I have the sincerity towards my comrades. It's not something that can be solved with an apology, but I ask for your forgiveness."
"There's nothing to forgive, I think that's a natural feeling."
Bosch responded in a calm voice.
"To be honest, I don't really want to believe that the German government had been betraying the EC, not just this time, but for many years now. Of course, if there was clear evidence, I would have to accept it, and I think it's better to verify the facts for yourself than to wait for someone else to present the evidence to you. Still, if Frederick Lancaster hadn't pointed it out, I don't think I would have been so motivated to expose the wrongdoings of the German government and military. And I don't think it's necessarily something to feel ashamed of. After all, it's human nature to want to hide the shame of one's own family as much as possible, right?"
"That's true. On the other hand, if a family member is trying to do something stupid or bad that no one knows about, it's natural to want to encourage them to stop as soon as possible, before it becomes public knowledge."
Saying that, Zead asked Latona.
"I understand your thoughts very well. And, on that basis, I ask you, will you accompany me to Bassau?"
"Yeah, sure."
Latona nodded without hesitation.

"It would be good if we could settle this at Bassau, but Zead is considering the possibility that we might have to go further. Therefore, we plan to load as many replacement units and supplies as we can onto a large transport plane, focusing on the new high-performance models that we're currently adjusting."
Using a Wanzer, Hermes quickly loaded several containers into a large transport plane, and once the work was finished, she spoke to me, who was helping her.
"When you say further ahead, does that mean entering Zaftra?"
When I asked, Hermes nodded with a serious look on his face.
"Yes. It depends on the circumstances, but Zead's guess is that evidence may be destroyed in Bassau. After all, for the German government, if evidence is found that a pipeline that's supposed to have been abolished is still in operation, that alone would be a major problem. If it were to be exposed, it wouldn't be surprising if they prepared a powerful, large-scale operation to destroy the evidence, even if it were to be so extreme as to blow up the entrance to the pipeline itself with a large amount of explosives. And since systems for destroying evidence are usually designed to operate in a very short time with the push of a button, it's unlikely that they would be able to stop it even if they wanted to. The best they could do would be to avoid getting caught up in it."
"...Blow up the entrance itself?"
I was a little taken aback and my eyes widened.
"I honestly didn't imagine it would get that far."
“Well, doing something so extravagant would draw a lot of attention, and if the pipeline were to break and become unusable, it would cause trouble for both Germany and Zaftra, so it would really be a last resort. Besides, if there were a large amount of explosives planted, they could be checked in advance from the transport plane, so I don’t think they would get caught up in it so easily.”
With that, Hermes shrugged.
"But Zead speculates that the German side might go that far. And if the evidence is destroyed in Bassau, then the only option left is to go to Zaftra. Infiltrating would be a big deal, but Zead seems to have judged that Zaftra is not as serious about destroying evidence as Germany."
"I see......"
"As I thought, Zead's readings are profound," I thought to myself. Then, Latona came over and asked Hermes quite abruptly.
"Have the hover legs been loaded?"
"Hover legs?"

Hermes asked, looking confused as to what on earth she was talking about. Latona responded in a tone that sounded a little annoyed.
"As I thought, they don't have them. Zead asked me what we needed to operate inside Zaftra, and I said that we should prepare hover legs. Zaftra has a lot of swamps and marshes and other terrain that even a Wanzer's legs can't traverse, let alone a vehicle. In particular, the west and south sides of Kursk, the end point of the pipeline, are filled with land where you can't move without hover legs. I worked for the border patrol in that area, so I know it all too well. If we don't need to use them, that's fine. But if we ever end up moving around the border areas of Zaftra in a Wanzer, not having hover legs would be fatal!"
"Okay, okay, hover legs."
Hermes looked a little annoyed by Latona's anger, but nodded.
"If I recall correctly, the Pegasus type hover leg delivered by Velda should be in the special parts warehouse. Let's go get it."
"We need to prepare at least five units! If everyone in the group doesn't have the same movement ability, we'll end up having to match the slowest unit!"
As Hermes climbed into the work Wanzer, Latona yelled at her with emphasis, and Hermes yelled back in a disgusted voice.
"I know, I know! Five Hovers... six including the spares. We can still carry that many."
"Ah, but Hermes has to pilot the transport plane, so won't there be four Wanzers?"
When I asked, Latona replied with a quizzical look.
"Have you not heard? The piloting of this transport plane will be taken over by Captain Robert's staff. Besides, Hermes alone will not be able to handle such a large plane."
"Ah, right, power."
At first I understood, but at the same time I was a little surprised, so I asked Latona in a lower voice.
"But Captain Robert and the flight crew are personnel who were dispatched, right? I'm amazed that they were able to undertake such a dangerous flight in so many ways."
"They have a lot of pride. It seems they were very upset when their project was thwarted by a lucky hit from an explosive shell cannon in the new resource area in Poland."
Latona responded with a faint smile.
"The captain said to Zead, "If we hadn't made such a blunder, we wouldn't have lost sight of the fleeing enemy, and fallen for Blauer Nebel's trick. Please let us get our

revenge."
"...I guess everyone was disappointed."
"Yes, I can't let it end with such an unsatisfactory conclusion," I nodded. Then, Bosch came into the hangar.
"Um, where's Hermes? Zead told me it's in the hangar."
"I'm heading to the Special Parts Warehouse to get some hover legs."
I replied and Bosch nodded slowly.
"I see. Well, it's not something that's urgent, so let's wait for him to come back."
"what's up?"
When Latona asked, Bosch answered in a matter-of-fact tone.
"The comrade in question sent me the radar patterns of the Munich Air Base, which has jurisdiction over the Bassau area. If we know these, we'll have a much better chance of facilitating an aircraft invasion of Bassau."
"...Isn't that the Air Force's top secret?"
Latona groaned, lowering her voice as expected.
"If it is revealed, you could be court-martialed for leaking secrets and shot to death."
"Yes, that's right. I told him that we could do something about it even if he didn't go to such lengths. It seems that he feels responsible for the insufficient data collation that led to Durandal falling into Blauer Nebel's trap."
Saying that, Bosch sighed softly.
“He’s a great guy, not only is he excellent, but he’s also earnest and honest. That’s why I don’t want to push him too hard. But even so, if I don’t keep him updated on what’s going on here, that will just make him extremely worried.”
"For that person's sake, we need to bring this incident to a proper conclusion."
“I said,” Bosch replied in a sincere tone.
"That's true. And he's not the only one who's worried. The majority of German soldiers, and the German people, have been living in the depths of anxiety and suspicion ever since this incident began. If there's anything we can do to solve it, we should do it."
And Bosch continued, half talking to himself.
"Zead said that he had not been requested or ordered to go to Bassau by anyone, and that it was a completely personal matter. That is certainly true, but on the other hand, there are many people who want the truth of this incident to be revealed and for it to be properly resolved. We are acting on behalf of those people."
"That's right."
I said aloud, and Latona nodded silently. Then, a work Wanzer piloted by Hermes

came carrying a container containing the hover legs.
"Hey, what's going on? Even Bosch is here. What are you all doing?"
When Hermes asked after getting off the Wanzer after carrying the container on board, Bosch once again reverted to his dazed attitude in response.
"I was waiting for you to come back. A comrade of mine got me some Luftwaffe radar patterns."
"Wow! Thanks a lot! That will greatly reduce, if not eliminate, the risk of being attacked by the Luftwaffe for trespassing!"
Hermes cheered obediently, and the two of them entered the transport plane. They were probably going to adjust the radar jamming device. Then I asked Latona about something that had been bothering me.
"By the way, haven't you told Beck anything?"
"I'm not speaking. If Zead decides it is necessary to speak, he will."
As expected, Latona responded very coldly, but when she looked at me, her tone softened a bit and she continued.
"Just as Zead said, this trip to Bassau is a dangerous, reckless and illegal operation. That Italian likes to do reckless things, so if we explain the situation he'll probably say he'll accompany us without a second thought. But to be honest, he's completely useless as a combat soldier. It would be a bad awakening if we took a novice who is only a Wanzer pilot in name to a dangerous place and he were to die, and on the other hand, I don't think we have the resources to protect him. It'll be safer in many ways if we leave him at HQ."
"That's right."
But Beck himself probably wouldn't think so, I thought silently. All preparations were complete about eight hours after Zead returned to headquarters and made the decision to head to Bassau.
"Now, we will now carry out the first illegal deployment since Durandal was founded. With this, we will become criminals with absolutely no room for excuses. Are you all prepared?"
Zead asked in a somewhat joking tone, and we all nodded with straight faces. Then we boarded the transport plane and took off for Bassau.
(Continue)

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